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THE MOTHER'S FAVOURITE.

VOL. II.

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CHAPTER I.

THE BOIS DE BOULOGNE.

MR. MORTON had been for some days in Paris, when, one afternoon, as usual, he drove to the Bois de Boulogne.

Readers, we must, with your permission, pause for a moment, and contemplate this magnificent lung of the town. Our friend having taken his seat in the carriage at the hotel, went through the Rue de Castiglione, then turned to the right into the Rue de Rivoli, along the gardens of the Tuileries, and from thence crossing the Place de la Concorde, was in the Champs Elysées, which grand avenue leads directly to the Park. The attention is here arrested by the colossal Arc de Triomphe, erected by the Great Napoleon, at an enormous expense.

It is beautiful, and well worthy of careful inspection; and as one drives rapidly by, the desire to examine it forces itself into the mind. After going round the bend, we are again in the straight and broad road leading to the gates of the Bois. After passing them we still continue in the long avenue, which leads to the fashionable road by the side of the lovely sheet of water.

From the commencement of the lake to its end comprises the limits of the drive, during the hours of splendid reunion of beautiful equipages. It lies between the water on one side, and a long, extended forest of trees on the other, along which for most of the way runs the bridle-path.

During the height of the Parisian season the density of carriages is great—there are two lines going up, and two coming down, drawing themselves out in long continuous streams, that seem revolving on an unseen centre.

The day which finds us in the Bois de

Boulogne, seated by the side of Mr. Morton, was one of those lovely autumnal ones which, like an old man's child, seems to be more prized than any of the bright summer ones. The sun was golden and warm, diffusing its heat through the cool air, until the just medium of temperature was obtained, neither too cold nor yet too warm. The trees still held their covering of leaves, although the latter had begun to change their green for more glowing tints, and stood erect and proud, as if conscious of their beauty; their foliage now and then rustling forth pleasant sounds, as the gentle breezes played softly through it. The lake lay beneath them, and on its bosom the day-god's beams were mirrored, tinging each ripple with its golden colour. The brightness of its reflection dazzled the eye; its splendour was radiated through everything.

Now and then might be seen a boat, gliding over the water. How delightful on a moonlight night, with only a light breeze, to lie on its bosom, with the clear,

cold, silver moon above us, shedding its soft and dreamy light, the long dark range of trees in the distance, yielding entirely to our own thoughts, hearing only the ripples gently breaking at the bow, in low musical murmurs, and softly swelling, amid Night's silence, through our being.

To return to the neglected day. Mr. Morton was now one of a number of those who were being drawn slowly from end to end in their carriages, looking at each other as they passed and repassed in succession, until, as the time ran on, one could almost fancy oneself amidst a party of friends, so often did the faces appear and reappear. At length there was a slight stir amid the assembled people and vehicles. The gendarmes gallopped by, and soon we saw the effulgence of Imperial splendour burst upon us. The Empress of the French was passing, while every head was uncovered, as the lovely sovereign returned with a sweet smile the loyal welcome.

At the time of which we write she was in the pride of her beauty, the fulness of

her charms, when the years had mellowed into softness the radiant brightness of her fascinations. Never did more lovely woman wear the ancient crown matrimonial of France. Seated in the Imperial carriage, she shone forth resplendent in the perfection of nature. We paid our homage to royalty and beauty.

One of the splendid equipages that moved onward in the line contained another worthy of admiration, royal in her loveliness, and possessed of all the attractions that render woman so irresistible when she assaults the heart.

Mr. Morton was a man of high and honourable principle, but not strait-laced—no, far from it. He felt the blood of youth in his veins, and he did not sternly check its beating pulse. The fair creature who had just at this moment passed, had drawn his attention, and that right earnestly, on the several occasions on which he had driven in the park; and he had become interested in her, and she, on her part, was not insensible to the glances that her

charms were drawing from one who would pass before the severest critics as a handsome and attractive man. Few women would feel displeased or annoyed at his attentions, either in words or looks. They passed and repassed, until the time appointed by fashion for the drive drew to a close, and the park was rapidly becoming empty; when Mr. Morton followed the rest, and the drive was at an end, and with it the scenes that made it so fascinating, but not so with the impressions they created.

The next and the following days, during the ensuing week, found our friend in the Bois de Boulogne, and also found there the fair unknown. At last, determining to discover who this lady was that always seemed so pleased at seeing him, he gave orders to the coachman to follow her carriage; he obeyed, lingering until she drove homeward, and then kept close behind. The equipage which held the lovely *incognita* entered the courtyard of one of the finest houses in the Faubourg St. Germain, but not before she had intuitively turned her

head, and, on perceiving our friend, bestowed upon him a bewitching smile. It was easy for him to learn the name of the hotel which he stood before; and that very evening, wishing to amuse himself, and relishing the excitement that it would produce, he resolved to address the following note to the lady, whom he had found to be the Countess de la Tour:

"Paris, November 3, 18—.

"Fair Incognita, my good fortune has given to me a glimpse of thy beauty, and deep is the impression made by the glance thou didst give. Hoping that my presumption in addressing you will not be misconstrued, and reckoned as an act of rudeness, but held as a mark of my esteem and homage, if it be consistent with safety and honour, I pray you to give me a rendezvous, that I may express in words the sentiments which animate me. I remain as thou hast made me,

"Your obedient servant, R. M.

"Address, R. M., Galignani."

As Mr. Morton sealed and addressed the note, he smiled, for he was pleased at finding something to divert his thoughts from unpleasant subjects. Our readers must not suppose for a moment that his love had cooled toward Margaret. Far from it; separation and time only served to strengthen it; her image was constantly before him—she was very, very often the subject of his thoughts. But, as we have already said, he had some strong reason for wishing to free his heart from this passion, and in this little adventure he hoped to find some excitement to act as a counter-balance to his over-charged feelings. He merely thought of the present pleasure, and not of the future consequences of this step. In fact, as is the case with most men who have lived adventurous lives, he was generally careless as to consequences.

We will not anticipate, but patiently await the disclosures that the coming future may give us, and in due time present them faithfully to our readers.

The next morning Mr. Morton called at Galignani's, and found there a reply to his note of the previous day. The contents were as follows:—

"Boulevart St. Germain, November 4th, 18—.

"MONSIEUR,

"I cannot, with any show of reason, blame your note, for I know very well that it was my own conduct which caused you to write it. I am lonely—so very, very lonely, that I cannot resist the interest with which you have inspired me. I know how imprudently I am acting, but if you knew all you would, I think, be able to forgive me. You ask for an interview—ought I to grant it? I hardly know, but in cases of doubt I always follow my inclinations, so you see your prayer is listened to. Do you not think me foolish to make an appointment with an entire stranger? But our meeting may make you a friend, and then there will be no harm. Really I am chatting with you, thoughtless of our non-acquaintance. I must put an

end to it. If you drive to the Bois de Boulogne to-day, leave your carriage at the bottom of the lake, and wait until you see me; follow, when you see me alight—continue following until we are in some of the by-paths, then you may speak. You must be careful to keep at a distance during the walk, and, above all, do not let anyone watch you. The time to be there is four.

"I remain,

"L."

Such was the letter from the fair Countess.

Mr. Morton had not looked for so willing a consent, and stood for some minutes doubting what to do. For although he was thoroughly brave and willing to do almost anything to divert his thoughts from Margaret, he was well aware of all the danger of such an intrigue as the one in question. At length, however, as the reader will have anticipated, he determined to go and see the end. Acting on this conclusion, he was at the appointed place at the specified time.

Alighting to walk, he was not long in discovering the Countess. Doing as he had been instructed, he went slowly after her. At the other end of the lake she left her carriage, as if to promenade, but soon crossed the road and turned into the forest of trees. She was out of sight of everybody but the one who followed. She stopped, turned, and smiled. Our friend at once approached, hat in hand, and took the little hand that was held out to him in his own.

"I must beg a thousand pardons. You are very kind, Madame, to gratify my desire. No one could see you without feeling it, and I could not without giving that desire expression. I hope that you do not think me rude."

"Monsieur has done nothing which needs pardon, and had he, I could not refuse it. Let us go further on, where no prying eyes can see us."

"You seem much like an old friend, Madame. When I first saw you it seemed to me as though I had known you all my life—as though we had been brought up as

children together, and that, if we could only meet, we should have a thousand interesting things to say to each other."

"Ah! Monsieur, and my feeling, on the contrary, when we first met, was, that you were some one whom I had often longed to see, but then saw for the first time."

As will be seen from the following remark, Mr. Morton hastened to overwhelm the Countess with flattering speeches.

"Monsieur is very gallant, and says many things, but does he think and feel all that he says?"

"Ask yourself if one could do otherwise," replied Mr. Morton, taking her hand, to which she did not object. It was evident that she was becoming affected by the conversation.

Our friend saw it, and the man could not repress a feeling of satisfied pride at the homage. What man could, when a beautiful woman was by his side, animated by such feelings as agitated the Countess.

"You are a stranger in Paris, are you not, Monsieur?"

"No, not entirely a stranger; I have been here before, but must own that one of its greatest attractions was hitherto unknown to me."

"We must return, or else some watchful eye may see us. I often fancy that you will think me very bold in giving you this rendezvous, but I could not resist my desire to meet you."

"Think that by no means, madame. In meeting we have but obeyed the impulse of some mysterious power."

By this time they had reached the spot where they had met, and at which they must part.

"To grant me the interview was most kind; but I must say it is very short, and even the longest time would appear only as a moment in your society. Must you return so soon?"

"Yes; it would not do to remain longer. I run great risks even now—I tremble when I think of it."

He felt the little hand twitch nervously in his own.

"Is this to be our last meeting? Can you not arrange some plan by which I can see you to-morrow?"

"I fear to name any," replied the Countess; "discovery would be ruin, which is fearful to contemplate."

At this moment Mr. Morton thought of the apartments which he had engaged, and which would be ready to-day. They were at the corner of the Rue de la Paix and the Place Vendôme, the left-hand side going to the Rue de Rivoli, and in a line with the Hôtel Bristol. It struck him that she might possibly consent to come there, if he could convince her that there would be no one to watch them.

"If madame would not be angry, I have a proposition to make which will facilitate our meetings, if it should meet with your approbation."

"Do tell me what it is?"

"I have apartments in the Place Vendôme on the first floor, where you could come without the slightest danger of discovery. I hope you are not offended,

madame? You will be as safe and as much respected as in your own house."

"Alas!" sighed the Countess to herself; "is it impossible, then, for a lonely woman to find a man who will be in all honour her friend?"

But as she again gazed into Mr. Morton's face, she saw there so much candour and so much respect for herself, that, after a pause, she said suddenly, with energy,

"To-morrow at two you may expect me, if nothing should occur to prevent my coming."

"Thanks, thanks—you are most kind. How can I ever thank you sufficiently?"

They then separated, each returning to their carriages by different directions. They met again in the drive, and passed as strangers.

CHAPTER II.

LOVE AND HONOUR.

THE next day found our friend installed in his new apartments. He was seated in an arm-chair smoking a cigar, and reading *Galignani*. The suite of rooms comprised the drawing-room, dining-room, and two bed-rooms. They were furnished in a very sumptuous and elegant manner, displaying taste and costliness at the same time. As is customary in France, there was a clock in every room—it is a peculiarity of the people. I cannot assign any reason for it; they may do it to gratify a desire to be always informed of the time, or, it may be, from a love of display, and from their considering clocks as more ornamental than other things. No matter what

the cause may be, the fact was that every mantelpiece in Mr. Morton's apartments had its clock. The other furniture indicated splendour and wealth.

The eyes of Mr. Morton were constantly raised from the paper, and fixed on the clock opposite to him. It yet wanted twenty minutes to the appointed time, and he was already growing impatient. Time passed on, and at length there was a knock at the door, which soon opened, and in walked a female, thickly veiled. Our friend arose, and was in a moment at her side, the veil was removed, and the lovely Countess stood before him. They were soon seated.

"Are you certain that no one will know about my being here? Is your servant to be relied on?" said the Countess, pale and agitated.

She was conscious of doing wrong, and feared every shadow that raised itself before her.

"Perfectly. You need give yourself no uneasiness; it is not possible that you could be discovered. Let me thank you

for thus honouring me with your presence. I feared that you might not be able to come."

"Fortunately, my husband left town this morning for his country-seat, having some business to transact there, so there was nothing to prevent me."

Mr. Morton had set himself a very difficult task, and one which few men could carry out steadily. For the purpose of distracting his mind from the recollection of Margaret, he had resolved to yield to all the fascinations of the Countess's society, and yet keep both her and himself free from any contact with dishonour. But now that the lady was actually before him, blushing, trembling, with all her charms heightened a hundred-fold by emotion, he saw with a thrill of dismay, and yet with a wild joy, on the edge of what a precipice they stood. Controlling his feelings, however, and assuming an air of gaiety, he said,

"He is truly very obliging to leave when it is most convenient to you. How long

does he intend staying away? Some time, I hope. No one, of course, knows of your present doings?"

"No one but my maid Nannette. She is as true as steel; my secret is as safe in her care as in my own, and one must have some one to arrange everything. If my husband were at home Nannette would be indispensable; in fact, we could not do without her."

"You, of course, know best, but I always fear to trust any one with a secret of importance."

"Never fear for that," replied the Countess. "Do you not think," she continued, "that I am very bold to come to your apartments in this manner?"

"Not at all," exclaimed Mr. Morton, who was seated near and held her hand. He was becoming more and more sensible to the fascinations of the lovely woman by his side. "Madame, you will pardon me for what I am forced to say. I cannot resist telling you the love which your beauty has inspired me with. Since first

seeing you, your image has held itself centred in my heart. I love you. My feelings are too strong for me to restrain them. Will you not look with compassion on one who is your devoted slave? Let me hope that you reciprocate the passion which your loveliness has created in me. Do not doom me to disappointment and misery, but shed on my life the bright effulgence of your love, which will dispel every cloud that hovers over me. Madame, may I hope?"

He now saw, by the looks and emotion of his fair companion, that she was not far from having the same feelings as himself, and in the ecstacy of the moment he placed his arm round her waist, and imprinted on her sweet lips a kiss that thrilled through the beings of the two, and mingled their souls together in the soft and blissful sensation of love's embrace.

"Monsieur, you must not. I fear you—I fear myself. I must not remain longer; 'tis time that I returned. Do not keep me," she exclaimed, as he held her by the

hand and waist. "I feel the fulness of your words and re-echo their sentiments. Would that they had never pleased my ear, or that all was changed. Do let me go."

She had not, until this moment, considered the danger she was running into. It now struck her with all its force, and she wished to escape; she desired to have time to consider.

"Do you mistrust me?—have you at this early hour lost confidence in my honour? You are unkind. Your words afflict me with sorrow."

"No, no, it is not that I fear you, but I dare not trust myself. Let me go now, and some day you may come to my hotel to me. I will let you know by note. My husband will be away for some time. The servants will consider you as a friend. Do not, I pray, lightly esteem my conduct. I am young, and no doubt foolish; married to a man whom I can never love; forced into it by my parents."

With these words she arose to depart.

Our friend pressed her hand to his lips, and she was gone, leaving him half chagrined and half pleased at this conclusion of an affair which at first bore every evidence of ending otherwise. He pondered for a long time, with various feelings, over every incident of the interview, sometimes heaping contumelious epithets upon himself for allowing the beautiful Countess to slip so easily from his grasp. But at length his better thoughts prevailed, and he was not at all displeased at the turn that the interview had taken, and resolved to put an end to the affair after one more meeting. He thought of Margaret, and felt some pricks of conscience about his proceedings; for her pure image still occupied the most elevated place in his heart—in fact, it was placed on the high altar of his affection.

At times he felt inclined to return to England, and accept his friend Wilton's invitation, and so be near her; but then that would not be consistent with his plan of banishing her, if possible, from his

thoughts. He discarded this idea, therefore, and settled himself into his old resolutions again.

That afternoon he did not go to the Bois de Boulogne, but occupied his time in writing to England, and reading. In the evening he went to the Opera.

Two days afterwards he received a note from the Countess. This is a copy of the original:

"Boulevart St. Germain, November 7th, 18—.

"My dearest Monsieur,

"When last we met I promised to give you another appointment, and that at my hotel. This morning I received a letter from the Count, my husband, in which he says that his stay will be protracted for another week. It would be better, perhaps, far better, if we never met again; but I have found that I can trust to your honour to respect that of a weak and far too fond woman. You must excuse me for my silence, as I was so agitated and alarmed by the novelty of my position at

your apartments, as to render me unable until now to write. Why have you not been on the drive for the last two days? The place possessed no interest, you not being there. I only took a few turns, and returned home to think. Ah! Monsieur, I fear my thoughts are too much about you. I cannot help it, do what I will. Do not fail to come; I must see you again, or else——I will not say more, but leave you to imagine the contending emotions which possess me. My maid will wait for an answer.

"Your friend,

"L——."

He mused over this epistle for some minutes, and resolved at length to accept the invitation so kindly offered.

It is now time to observe that the Countess, when she left Mr. Morton's, did not see a figure, some doors below, apparently looking into the windows of a shop, but really gazing intently at her. She returned home, remaining in ignorance of what had occurred since her departure.

Sometime after she had left her own home to proceed to Mr. Morton's, a gentleman might have been seen lingering about the place, until he was joined by a female, who appeared like a lady's-maid. They both walked away to some distance, and stopped round the corner of the next street. The man looked carefully round, and seeing no one near, said to his companion,

"Well, my little rogue, how have you succeeded?—does everything go on well? Is she going to meet him?" he continued, while a bitter smile of fiendish triumph played over his face.

"Yes, my lord; it was she whom you just saw leaving the hotel. The appointment is for two o'clock."

"Where is the place?" asked the nobleman, excitedly.

"My lady is going to the English gentleman's own apartments."

"How did you discover this?"

"My lady told me. They made the appointment when they met in the Bois de

Boulogne. My lady did not wish at first to accept it, but there being no other place where they could come together, she at length consented."

"You are a good girl—a very good girl—my pretty little one, and I will not forget you. You have done well. Are there no letters?"

"There are, my lord; I have the one which my lady received from her lover, and also the copy of her reply. Here they are," said the woman, handing at the same time two letters to the nobleman, who received them eagerly, and read them at once. When he had finished, he murmured to himself:

"They are very cautious, but they are nevertheless invaluable. She cannot disprove this," he chuckled, with fiendish joy. "Ah! ha! my little Countess, you are now in my power—nothing can save you from my vengeance. This is something that I have hoped for during the last two years. Little does she dream that I am here; fool that she was to trust to Nannette! Woman!

woman! you must be less dependent on others if you wish to succeed. Never trust your own sex!—Nannette," continued he, turning to her; "you must meet me to-night at my rooms, and tell me all about the occurrences of this interview. Do you hear?—you must not fail."

"Do I ever fail when you command me, my lord? I shall be with you at nine this evening."

"Good-bye for the present. Stop!—first tell me where the apartments of this English gentleman are."

She told him, and they separated—she returning to the hotel, and the nobleman to the Place Vendôme, where we saw him watching the exit of the Countess, whom he recognised, despite her thick veil.

It may be as well to describe the Comte de la Tour, for he it was, and also give our readers some insight into the family affairs. The Count was about middle height, bold and dashing in his appearance, but not handsome, very dark complexion, black eyes and hair, low forehead, good

nose and mouth. Around the latter was a constant look of malignity, that destroyed much of its beauty. He wore a moustache and imperial. Such is the man we have already partially introduced to our readers. He was of an old and proud family, and, being the only son, was naturally allowed his own way by fond and over-indulgent parents, who idolized him. The result of this, added to his own evil tendencies, brought about a very bad state of mind and conduct. His youth had been one of dissipation and recklessness, and although this course of life told on his health, that did not stop him in his career. At length something occurred which seemed likely to do so, for three years previously to our presenting him to the reader he had seen and loved the beautiful daughter of a neighbouring gentleman. The lady did not reciprocate his attachment, but the family made all the necessary arrangements, as is always done in France, without reference to the wishes of the parties most immediately concerned.

Louise de Beaufleur was at that time in her eighteenth year, in all the perfection of her maiden charms, beautiful of face, and lovely of form—the painter's dream, and the sculptor's model. Her hair was dark with the shade of night, as its waves floated backwards from the broad forehead and lay behind in masses. Her complexion was inclined slightly to fairness, with a soft tinge of a rich olive tint, and with a perceptible colour breaking through. The eyes were brown, soft, and bright, full of expression and depth, and the light of love. Her nose was of the purely Grecian order, above a short upper lip, and a small, well-shaped mouth with coral lips, beneath which, as the smile played around and partly opened them, were teeth of pearl. The neck and shoulders were dazzlingly white and pure. Such was the young girl whom the Count demanded in marriage, and whom her parents gave to him.

For the first few months of his married life he was all devotion and love, but after that he soon tired and longed for new ob-

jects for the gratification of his passions. From that time his life had been the counterpart of his youth, only aggravated and heightened by greater dissoluteness than formerly, if that were possible.

His young wife had borne all; she found that repeated remonstrances were in vain, and only produced unpleasant results for her. The nature of the Countess was warm and loving; she was a woman to whom love was a necessity, without which she found existence scarcely endurable. Her husband had rendered himself odious and hateful; he had forced her by his conduct to entertain feelings of the most intense aversion towards him. But at the same time her virtue had prevented her from ever turning to the world, and there seeking a congenial spirit to love; and it was not until she had been struck by the noble bearing of Mr. Morton, and the air of mental power and goodness evident in his features, that she hoped to find a friend.

To explain the mystery of Nannette's betrayal of her mistress, and the Count's

pretended departure for his château, is easily done in a few words. The maid had been seduced by the Count, and was therefore his creature. Madame, who placed every confidence in her maid, had told her of the Englishman she had met in the drive, and Nannette had at once communicated the information to her lover, the Count, who, being fully alive to the sentiments entertained towards him by his wife, charged the maid to keep good watch over the Countess's proceedings. Thus occurred all that has so far transpired.

On returning to her hotel the Countess at once went to her boudoir, and there gave way to her feelings. Virtue is so strong an instinct with women, that the boldest and most callous of the sex cannot depart a hairsbreadth from its confines without feeling for a time an agony to which no other pain can be compared. It was in vain that the Countess heaped reproaches upon her father for having forced her into such a hateful marriage; it was in vain that she pictured to herself in gloomy colours the

cruelty and vicious conduct of her husband; her own fault stood blacker and blacker before her, and made the misdoings of others appear as though white in comparison.

A woman never commits an indiscretion which places her virtue in jeopardy without fully foreseeing the possible consequences. As a compensation for her weakness, a certain amount of education is every woman's birthright. The Countess had striven hard to persuade herself that in making acquaintance with Mr. Morton she was only yielding to a justifiable longing for human companionship; but now, as she buried her face in her pillow, she was compelled to confess, with bitter tears, that passion, that vice—give the thing its own ugly name—had been her instigator through the whole bad business. But, of course, after many hours of remorse, a tempter, dressed up in all the austere majesty of virtue, appeared before her and told her that the best possible thing to do was to summon Mr. Morton

to her presence, and then and there finally dismiss him.

Acting on this advice, the note which Mr. Morton received was penned, and intrusted to Nannette, who, making a copy of it, carried it to its destination. The contents we have already seen. The messenger waited for an answer, which was soon given; and had a tone about it, as will be seen, inconsistent with any feeling of real respect for the person for whom it was meant.

"Place Vendôme, November 7th, 18—.

"My dearest Madame,

"I have just laid aside your most charming note, which has come to me like a ray of sunshine out of darkness. I did not frequent the Bois de Boulogne for reasons which I will explain when I have the pleasure of again seeing you. For the last two days there has been existing in my mind a foreboding of evil, which I have tried in vain to shake off. Had I known that my presence would

have added to your pleasure, I would have disregarded all other considerations in contributing to your enjoyment. If I said anything to cause you pain during your visit to me, I most humbly beg forgiveness, and express my sincere sorrow. I shall do myself the honour to be with you at nine this evening.

"Your devoted friend,

"R. M."

As soon as Nannette received this answer she hurried to the rooms of the Count, to whom she had given notice of her intended visit during the morning. She found him seated before a table writing a letter. As soon as he saw the visitor, he motioned her to a chair near him, but not before snatching some half-dozen kisses from as willing and tempting a pair of lips as one would wish to see.

"Well, my little love, what have you to say for yourself this morning? Some good news, I hope. Ah! come, let me know all."

"Here are the letters, which will explain all," replied Nannette, drawing from her pocket the copy of her mistress's letter, and the answer from Mr. Morton.

The Count read with eagerness the one from his wife, during which a smile of bitter anger played around his mouth, and gave to his face an almost demoniacal expression.

"Good, good!" he chuckled to himself; "so much for my prudish wife! Curse her! Is it for this conduct that she assumes her airs of virtue and goodness? Ha! ha! we will see—we will see what you will say to all this. Now for the answer of the English fool!" he said between his clenched teeth. "I will teach him a lesson never to be forgotten, if he lives to remember anything."

He opened the letter with great care, so that it might be sealed again to prevent discovery.

The contents of Mr. Morton's epistle were devoured with avidity—not a word was

lost. When, at last, after perusing it some three or four times, and pondering it over in his mind, he handed it to his companion, and said laconically,

"Read."

During this time, and for some ten or fifteen minutes, he continued in a thoughtful mood. A smile of success at length illuminated his darkened face.

"I have it—I have it!" he cried. "It shall be done!"

Nannette, who had finished reading the note, for some time looked on her master with an air of curiosity, which soon changed to one of terror, for there was murder in his eyes—murder in his gestures.

The answer was safely and neatly resealed, and given into the possession of the maid.

"Now, Nannette, you must deliver this to your mistress. At half-past eight o'clock you will be at the private door, to allow me and some companions to enter. You must take every care that no one is about, as the strictest secrecy must be preserved,

or else my plan will fall through. Mind what I say, and do what I tell you to the very letter. If I succeed you shall have a thousand francs, and if I should fail by any fault of yours, the reward will be converted into something less pleasant."

"I do, my lord. Everything you command shall be executed to the very best of my ability. You know very well that I would do anything for you. I wish you would not look so angry. Do be kind and pleasant."

"I am not angry with you, my dear little monkey!" exclaimed the Count kissing her; "I am only enraged with your virtuous mistress and the miserable Englishman. Bitterly will he rue the day that brought him in contact with my wife. Does not the Countess suspect you at all?—has she still the same confidence as ever? She is very silly. Come, now, you must be going back, or else she will think your protracted absence very strange. Good-bye, and be very careful. Do not, for the world, do any-

thing to give rise to the least suspicion."

Nannette soon arrived at the hotel, and gave the letter to her mistress, who opened it, and read its contents with eagerness. When she had finished, she heaved a sigh that seemed almost to break her heart, so sad and mournful was it. The fast-approaching night she dreaded, and yet wished that it would come. Her heart oftentimes misgave her, and felt full of woe. Not a ray of sunshine broke through the impenetrable gloom which surrounded her, with its thick mist of sorrow. No; all was darkness and despair, without a hope, without a straw to catch hold of, to make life worth living. Thus all the day was passed, one grief being drowned by another for the time, to rise again with renewed strength.

Unhappy one, we feel our hearts open to thee with pity and compassion. Would that we could stretch forth a helping hand to draw thee from thy present misery; but what is that compared to that which is preparing to envelope thee in its terrible

embraces? May some angel hover over thee, and avert the impending ruin that must in nature's course, unless stopped by Providence, fall on thee. Nerve thyself to courage, yield not to fear and threats, but brave the tempest with the strong and determined resistance that thou didst display when thou wast tempted to forget the duty of a wife, the heirloom of thy children, and the most sacred jewel of thy womanhood, that sitteth on thee in radiant brightness. Thou hast preserved thy virtue; thy purity has gained a noble triumph.

Whilst the shades of night were fast falling, the Countess was expecting the feared and hoped-for interview, in which she was to assert the proud pre-eminency of modesty.

The day was passed by Mr. Morton in a conflict with contending emotions. He regretted the occurrences of the past ten days, and wished that it all had been a dream. He entertained the highest feelings of respect and kindness towards the Countess; had he not loved Margaret he would

have loved her. He had in a moment of forgetfulness, and a new-born, short-lived passion, said to her she was his beloved.

"Foolish, foolish moment!—would that the words had never passed my lips! Would that my tongue had cleaved to the roof of my mouth before I had insulted her innocent ear with the words which would be equally criminal whether true or false.

The coming night was to him one pregnant with events, the consequences of which he feared to meet. It was not only that he dreaded to have to listen to her words of reproach, and see the tears flow from those soft speaking eyes; but he was also inspired with a feeling of coming and unseen danger, that threatened to overwhelm him.

During the day the Count might have been seen in a not very reputable part of Paris, seated in a garret, conversing with three as villanous-looking men as one could well meet. In answer to some question addressed to them, the leader, for

such he appeared, replied: "You may trust to us, as long as we are well paid; we care not what the work is—do we, comrades?"

"Not we," they answered; "give us money, and we are your slaves to do what you will. We are not afraid at the sight of blood."

"I do not wish him to be killed—at least, not at present. I wish to have him brought to your place, and kept until I have determined what to do with the accursed Englishman. Mind, do not harm him, but follow my instructions, and your recompense shall be what we have already arranged. And further, should all things go as I wish, I will even add to your pay. You shall never regret this work. Now I will leave you. Remember half-past eight o'clock—not a minute later."

With this they separated.

CHAPTER III.

THE GRANDMOTHER.

WE are again at Brompton Court, having left Mr. Morton to his own devices in Paris. This time we see a new face among the inmates of this mansion. It is that of one whom we have, in one of our earlier chapters, casually mentioned—none other than the grandmother of Sir Henry, the Dowager Lady Hargreave, who was now about seventy-seven years of age, and not even bent under the accumulation of years that were hanging on her. She was still erect and straight-backed as any girl of eighteen summers need wish to be. It is true that the hand of Time had made snow-white her hair, which was well concealed by a wig as black and glossy as her

own locks had been in times of yore; but we must not dilate at too great length on this portion of her ladyship's belongings, or else her pride and dignity may take offence. She was not tall; her eyes were of light blue, and although faded somewhat by the action of long years of constant use, were still beautiful and expressive; the eyebrows still retained their own proud arch, and, pencilled the same as in youth, gave relief to the broad high forehead. The nose was not of any peculiar order, but harmonised with the rest of the features; her mouth was good, and very few wrinkles existed on her face to tell the ravages of time. With a stately figure, and somewhat haughty bearing, she stood confessed the gentlewoman in every movement. She was seated in the drawing-room with her daughter-in-law, Lady Harriet.

"Harriet, dear, there are no tidings of Robert, are there? Dear boy!—how much I loved and cherished him! Foolish—very foolish—was it to leave his home for a distant colony. I cannot believe about his

death. I am certain he will come back some day. It must have been a mistake the report of his end. And yet, ah me! I fear it is too true. Would that I had never lived to see the day!"

During this speech Lady Harriet grew pale and red by turns, and seemed much annoyed by it. She nevertheless continued self-possessed and calm.

"Why will you always talk as if he were still alive? I am sure that I should be overjoyed to see the darling again; but facts are facts. The proofs of his death are beyond question. You are foolish to worry yourself about a misery long passed. I do not think that you would have cared so deeply had Henry been the one."

"Not care?—why should I not feel the same towards one grandchild as another, they being brothers?" replied the old lady, rather sharply.

"It is so useless to open the old wounds afresh, and bring into the present the sorrows of other days. There are now more than twelve years, come and gone,

since that unhappy day. I wish that you would not constantly remind me of it—it does no good."

Lady Harriet concluded by wiping away a tear that was about to fall from her eye.

"You are right, Harriet, I am old and foolish. Old hearts cannot heal as quickly as younger ones. You have other things to occupy your thoughts, but with me it is brood, brood over the past. Old age lives best when it lives in the happy memory of other days, and most miserably in the remembrance of sorrow."

The blue eyes of the grandmother became misty. Often had tears flowed from them at the recollection of the noble grandson, whom she had loved with all a grandmother's love.

"What do you think, mother, of Henry's intended proposal to Miss Wendell—would it not be a splendid thing for the family?" said Lady Harriet, turning the conversation.

"Yes. I remember poor dear Harold

often saying that if there was one thing more than another he desired, that thing was to have Robert marry Margaret. Little did he think, when he dreamed over that pet scheme, that his dear boy would so soon follow him to the grave. Ah! Harriet, little can we poor mortals tell of the future. It is well that we are all in the hands of a just and good God, who does everything for our interest."

"True, very true, we are doomed through life to bitter disappointments, but Harold's theory will be carried out if Henry should succeed. As you say, all things are for the best. Do you not remember Mr. Wendell's sister Mary, who married Lord Courtland? Well, she has just left her brother's. She called to see you, but you were not well enough to see her—don't you remember it?"

"Perfectly. She was not the most agreeable of girls, but very pretty and clever. Were you going to say anything about her?"

"Only that she is just the same as when

she used to come here as a girl. A little worse tempered, perhaps, with a greater taste for managing, and rather more conceited. During her stay with the Wendells she took everything in her own hands, I hear. The servants are by no means well inclined towards her at the Hall, and no blame to them. Some one was telling me last season that the Earl and she did not live very happily together. I do not wonder at it—who could agree with her?"

"Is her husband firm and yet gentle—does he vindicate his rights, or does he give way to her control?" And the old lady sighed as she thought of the kind of life her own son had led with Lady Harriet.

"Lord Courtland is rather a weak man, without much mind, and generally yields to his wife in everything; but then she is so exacting, that even his sluggish nature sometimes rebels, and tries to throw off the yoke. She manages him, however, completely—he dare not say that his soul is his own; and I really believe that he always votes in the Lords as she directs.

Is it not an abominable shame of her?"

"Shame! I should blush if I had a daughter who conducted herself in such an unseemly manner. Why are not women content to occupy the position which Nature intended they should, without usurping the sphere which man alone should fill," replied Lady Hargreave.

Oh! woman, when wilt thou let fall from off thine eyes the scales which render thee blind to reason. We do not speak of the whole sex, but of those who so far forget their duty and place as to assault that of their husbands. There are many of this class in the world, numbers who have often come under the immediate notice of the author. There lives not a being more to be pitied, and even shunned, than a woman who takes to herself those privileges and rights which appertain exclusively to man. She is placing herself in a wrong position, and entailing on herself duties which she cannot perform; and even should she succeed in accomplishing them, they never redound to her credit. On the contrary, it

draws upon her the reproach of the opposite sex, and contempt of her own, not even excepting those who are following in the same well-beaten pathway. Would that all and every woman would strive to fill the high and sacred positions assigned to her by Providence—those of the true and loving wife, the fond and gentle mother; and in these their own and proper spheres display their virtue, love, and goodness.

This is a question that cannot be easily answered; but the solution can most probably be found in the manner in which their parents have acted towards them during their childhood. The parents are responsible in a great measure for the shortcomings of their children in after life. The mother especially is accountable for their future doings. Mind, I do not mean that all the actions and deeds of people are the result of neglect or care on the part of the heads of families, but I do believe that most of their good or evil conduct is in some way influenced by their early train-

ing. People have in general but a faint idea of the duties they ought conscientiously to perform, unmindful of the unpleasant consequences which may result from their neglect.

After a pause, the old lady, changing the subject, said,

"Lady Courtland has a very pretty daughter, has she not? Henry has often spoken about her of late—he called her Lady Frances. Is Henry very fond of Miss Wendell, or is it to be for money only that he intends to marry her? Those marriages never result in much happiness to either party."

"I believe he is very fond of Margaret Wendell, who is, indeed, too pretty for any man not to love her. Yes, Lady Frances Atherly is very pretty, but rather fast, I should think. She threw herself at Henry's head in right good earnest, until Lord Renford took a fancy to her."

At this moment the door opened, and Sir Henry entered. He went to his grandmother and kissed her affectionately.

"Good morning, Henry," she said, as she warmly greeted her grandson; "I hope you are well. Your mother has been telling me something about you which I hope may prove true."

"Come, tell me what it is—no mystery," replied the Baronet. "What have you been telling grandmamma? I think I can guess—something about the Wendells, is it not?"

"Yes, my dear boy, that is it. Your intentions towards Margaret were the subject we were talking about. I trust it will turn out all right. How did you find her the last time you were there? Did she seem pleased to see you? You must let me know how you progress. She has no doubt forgotten Mr. Morton; it is at least two months since she has seen him."

"You were right," replied Sir Henry, "when you said she would soon forget him, when he was once out of sight. From what I can gather, she never thinks of him; whenever I mention his name, she

does not appear at all animated, nor does she care to dwell on the subject, but becomes rather ennuyée'd."

"You see, Henry, that old heads are sometimes better able to judge than younger ones. I suppose you will go over to the Hall to-morrow? When do you intend making the final effort? You must not precipitate matters, nor yet be too slow in striking. You, of course, will be better able to tell, and appreciate the proper moment when it arrives."

"From what has so far transpired, I do not think that I am premature in saying that matters are so shaping themselves as to justify me in making an offer of my hand and fortune," said Sir Henry, rather bitterly as he pronounced the word fortune, at which his mother also smiled, and replied, in a sarcastic voice:

"The addition of her estates to your very good rent-roll will be a grand thing. You should not be over-certain about the result, or else the disappointment will be very great. Young people are always so

visionary; they do not look out for failure, but count on success."

"Your dear father was just like that," said the old lady, with a sigh.

At this juncture of the conversation the door opened, and the butler brought in the morning mail, which consisted of some papers, a letter, with a deep black edge, addressed to Lady Harriet, and another to Sir Henry.

The black-edged letter was soon opened and read with great apparent interest by her ladyship. She handed it to Sir Henry, who also read it with attention.

This letter was from the Earl of Merwyn, a near relative of the Hargreaves. As the epistle is of importance, affecting, as it will, the interests of the Baronet, we will give our readers an exact copy of it:

"Merwyn Castle, December 22nd, 18—.

"MY DEAR LADY HARRIET HARGREAVE,

"A most sudden and unexpected stroke of misfortune has befallen my family, and in the midst of my grief I write to

you. My three sons—the pride of my house, and hope of my old age—were three days since all lost in their yacht at sea, only one of the crew surviving to tell the dreadful tale. Thus I am deprived of my greatest pleasure and joy. My life was wrapped up in those boys, all equally precious and dear to me. You can sympathise with my sorrows, as you have also undergone the great and terrible affliction which has now come on me with threefold weight. The passing years may have naturally mellowed the misfortune which Providence in its dispensation saw fit to send on you as a trial, and I can only pray that it may be so in my case; but at present I am wild, and ready to go mad with the intensity of my sufferings, so greatly and heavily do they press on me, making life a burden. I cannot yield to the wisdom of God, nor do I find any comfort in resisting it. I must endeavour to calm my agitated and unsettled mind, so as to give you a partial account of the dreadful occurrence. Four days ago my

sons went on board their yacht, desiring me to accompany them. Would that I had done so, and all would now be over! I did not consent, as I am not very fond of the sea. The day was calm and beautiful —not a cloud was to be seen on the blue horizon; there was a fair wind, and everything promised a pleasant sail and speedy return. Alas! it was ordained otherwise. Towards night the sky became clouded and overcast; the wind rose, and soon blew heavily. The coming night promised to be wild and unsafe to any sail near the coast, which is high, bleak, and rocky. The yacht which bore my precious cargo was strong and weather-tried, but this storm was too much for her, and all was lost. I cannot enter into particulars, as it would be too much for my already overstrung nerves. Your son, Sir Henry, is now, of course, my heir; and if he could find time to visit a bereaved old man, it would be some consolation to me.

"Your affectionate kinsman,

"MERWYN."

Sir Henry, after reading it, passed the letter to his grandmother, who was very much affected by this sad occurrence. whilst Lady Harriet and her son felt far otherwise; for they saw in it a bright ray of sunshine breaking through the darkness. They exchanged looks of satisfaction.

"How sad!" exclaimed Lady Harriet, breaking the silence. "Only the other day they were full of life and strength, and now they are dead. Is it not a terrible blow for poor Lord Merwyn? I sympathise with him deeply in this awful affliction. Unhappy man!—what a wreck is the future to him; there is no pleasure this side of the grave for him to look to."

"How kindly," said the grandmother, "he mentions our loss in the death of dear Robert. Sorrow reminds us of the afflictions of others, and in their misfortunes we find some solace for our own grief."

"He must indeed be most miserable. I suppose we must write letters of condo-

lence," said Sir Henry. "I will write mine this evening, so as to send it by the morning's mail."

"The Dowager Lady Hargreave rose and withdrew.

"Mother, do you think that I ought not to press my suit with Miss Wendell in consequence of this sudden and sad event?"

"I do not see why you should not. We were not very intimate with them. Of course we must go into mourning for them; but otherwise I do not see any necessity to alter our course of life," she replied.

"I am glad of that, as I have some thoughts of going over to-morrow, and if the opportunity should offer itself I will do the deed. The suspense is fearful. But as I am heir to an earldom, she will no doubt look on me with a very favourable eye. Title is very pleasant to all people, but for a young girl it possesses irresistible attractions. To see herself one day the Countess of Merwyn, Margaret Wendell would probably overcome many

scruples; and if she did not, her father would insist on it. Is it not a most lucky thing to happen? Very hard for them and their father, but for us it comes in the very nick of time."

"Henry, dear, do not speak so unfeelingly of so sad and awful a catastrophe. It makes me shudder to hear you talk so lightly of so serious a subject. We are all liable to these terrible misfortunes."

"Now, mother, there is no use in putting on so long a face. It does not mend the matter in the least. Would you recall the past, and make us almost beggars, instead of now being the next heirs to an old man who cannot live much longer?" replied the son, in a cold, calculating manner.

"I had rather have the thing left to itself. Now tell me candidly, as your grandmother has gone, how you succeeded yesterday at the Hall? Mr. Wendell is always pleased to see you, is he not?"

"One would think that I was his son by the way he receives me. I am certain that he will be only too glad to give me

his daughter's hand and fortune; although now we are not so much in need of it as before this news. Who would ever have thought that I should come into the title?"

"Very true; but we must not let this golden prize slip through our hands, as many years may pass before you come into the property. Old people live very long when their deaths are wished for, as though the fact were a judgment on the wisher."

"He must be now, at least, seventy-five years of age. Surely he cannot last much longer, contrary and perverse as he may prove. I feel very much better than I did; but to go back to our former subject. I think the girl is much more inclined to me than ever before—I might say that she was bordering on fondness. Whenever I go there she appears most delighted to see me. To-morrow, should everything prove propitious, I will make the leap and see where I alight. By-the-bye, I want to go to Town for a few days."

"Why can you not remain here? Does not Brompton Court possess attractions enough to make it endurable? Your mother's society is of little account."

"Well, if you do not like it I will remain until after the Christmas holidays; and now I think I will have a shot at the rabbits."

The Baronet then arose, and left his mother to her own thoughts. They were something like the following:

"Very sad this melancholy accident. Extremely fortunate for us. It will be very pleasant to be the mother of a Countess. I might be allowed to bear the title by courtesy, I daresay, if I liked. It would not sound badly—the Dowager Countess of Merwyn—much better than Lady Harriet Hargreave. Well, well, fortune is very favourable just now, and smiles sweetly on our house. If Henry should marry Miss Wendell, he would be one of the wealthiest nobles in England. The estate of the Earl's are themselves very large. I wish that my mother-in-law would not be con-

stantly bringing to my mind the death of Robert. It gives me such a shock, from which I do not recover during the whole day. God knows that I think of him very often, much more than is good for my happiness and peace of mind. Alas! alas! shall I ever forget his end? Night after night I see his imploring face upturned to mine. Would that memory would cease to be, or that the past had never been!"

We will now leave Lady Harriet for the present, and trace the relationship between her son's family and the Earl of Merwyn.

The family of Hargreaves, bearing the title of Earls of Merwyn, was very ancient, having held the Earldom, by patent, from the time of Henry the Eighth, which monarch also conferred upon it the Viscountyship of Glendower. The family also held the Barony of Beaumaris, by writ, under the Second Henry. They had come over from Normandy with William the Conqueror, about whose person the founder of the family held a high position. Record

speaks of him as being a knight full of prowess, without fear, courteous and kind. The traditions of the family speak of a long line of noble ancestors, before the younger branch separated from the great stem. However, their nobility in England since the time of the Conqueror will be sufficient guarantee for the pureness of their blood.

About one hundred years ago, the then Earl of Merwyn had two sons, the Viscount Glendower and the Honourable Gerald Hargreave, who, being the youngest, naturally looked out for some honourable and pleasant occupation. The army was his choice. He served in the latter part of the great rebellion in the American colonies with much distinction, returning a Captain. He was soon afterwards ordered to India with his regiment, where he did service, and at the time of the war in the Peninsular he was the first Colonel in command. For distinguished services performed there, he rose to the rank of

Major-General, and was created a Baronet. He fell mortally wounded at the battle of Vittoria, bravely battling for his country against the French, led on by the lieutenants of the Great Napoleon, the living wonder of his age, who burst upon the world meteor-like, filling it with his greatness, and displaying to a wondering and terror-stricken generation the superiority of genius. It was fighting, first against this General, and afterwards against his splendid lieutenants, who were striving to enslave the Spaniards, that Sir Gerald fell.

After his return from America, he married an heiress, who brought him the magnificent property of Brompton Court, and who in due course presented him with one child, a son, who lived to be Sir Gerald Hargreave, the father of Sir Harold, and consequently Sir Henry's grandfather.

The first Sir Gerald's elder brother had issue by his wife, two sons and three daughters. The eldest son died without children; George, the younger, came into the title, and is the

present earl. He had married Lady Edith Merton, eldest daughter of the Marquis of Moorsby, by whom he had three sons and five daughters. Sir Henry was, therefore, first cousin once removed from the unfortunate peer, and was the heir next after the sons, who, as we have seen, were all drowned.

The Viscount Glendower was in his twenty-sixth year, never having married. The two younger brothers, the Honourable Gerald and the Honourable Horace Hargreave, were respectively twenty-two and twenty years of age.

Thus, by the misfortune which happened to the elder branch of the family, the younger one was benefitted, making good the old proverb, "It is an ill-wind that blows nobody any good."

The chief residence of the family was at Merwyn Castle, on the sea-coast of Wales, attached to which was a large estate. Besides this, there belonged to the family Eltham Abbey, in Derbyshire, a fine old country mansion, built in the fifteenth cen-

tury, and also a grand large castle in Scotland, called Laverock Keep. Over this latter estate the ancient barons had many times chased the fallow-deer through mountain pass and craggy steeps; and its stronghold had withstood many a fierce siege in feudal times, and in the civil wars, when the royal standard was there, proudly unfurled to the breeze, and waved defiantly over high tower and dark battlement.

Sir Henry was exultant over this unexpected good fortune, for although it is true that he had often cast a longing look at the family coronet, he had never imagined that it would press his brows, or that three as fine and healthy men as one could find through all England would ever give place to him. Accident had done for him what nature in its course would probably have refused to do. As he left the room his thoughts were tumultuous; he could hardly restrain his joy. Truly the Baronet was not in the proper frame of mind to pen a letter of condolence! No, he was much

more in the spirit to receive one of congratulation. With these thoughts and feelings we will leave him for the present.

CHAPTER IV.

A RETURN TO OLD SCENES UNTIL THE PAST MERGES IN THE PRESENT.

ONE clear, cold morning in December finds us again at the time-honoured mansion of the Wendells. The air was keen and frosty; the sun half-way up the sky, did not make itself much felt by the warmth it diffused, for the wind was too sharp, and the atmosphere too biting to permit it. The old trees in the park were bare, their covering having been stripped from them by the opening winter, which spares not in its onward course of blight;—the green leaves must fall before its withering touch, like men before the noisome breath of pestilence; and at times, when its fiercest humour prevails, it throws across

the silver lake a sheet of ice, smooth and beautiful, and lets fall gently and softly snow-flakes pure and white, which drop on the frozen ground, spreading a covering of whiteness, or stopping midway in their career, arrested by the outstretched branches of the huge oaks, outspreading beeches, or long avenues of elms, hang fantastically on every arm and twig, making coldly, chillingly, lovely the trees their master had robbed of their sunny, bright summer's garb.

Surrounded as it was by this chilling atmosphere, and looking cold and haughty amidst the stern old guardians, which stood almost menacingly around the stately mansion, we hesitated before entering the grand old doorway, so different was its present aspect to that which it had worn amidst the bright sunny summer, teeming with flowers, and filled with the perfume of a thousand beautiful and sweet-smelling plants.

Nevertheless, shaking off our timidity, as we would the snow from our shoes, we enter the Hall, and then proceeding to the

library, we there discover Mr. Wendell poring over some book. Shall we peer over his shoulder, and see what it is that binds his attention so strongly to the volume. We joyfully see Shakespeare in his hand. He is reading for the hundredth time that great poet's grand play of Hamlet the Dane; he is now at the part where the old Laertes is bidding his son adieu, giving him his blessing, and with that advice which has never been surpassed for its strength, terseness and universal scope, comprising everything that a father could have said to a son, beneficial and sterling; advice in which there was not a word too much, nor yet one wanting; advice which was complete and perfect, and which, if followed, would result always in good.

Leaving him to the perusal of his favourite play among the many loved ones, we will go to the school-room, and see if there we may catch a glimpse of our fair and lovely Margaret. Seated on a chair by the side of a table well covered with books and papers, was the young Mistress

of Wendell Hall. She was paler than her wont—those cheeks that are so fair and lightly tinged with pink were, when last we saw them, full flushed and rosy; but the change has not taken from her any beauty, for there is still colour enough left to make her lovely.

Near her was seated the French governess, whose sad story we heard in the second chapter of our first volume.

Margaret was at this time reading aloud to Mademoiselle from a collection of selections from the works of the best French authors. The book is entitled *Cours de Littérature Française.* The one which she was reading was the "*Mort d'Hippolyte,*" taken from Racine (1639—1699), Phidre, act v., which was soon finished to Mademoiselle's satisfaction.

It may be as well to take a hurried retrospect of the doings at Wendell Hall during our absence, so that we may be able to understand more fully those events which are to follow. The reader will no doubt often say that he wishes we

would adhere more strictly to our story, and not wander into the regions of speculation, as we fear we have sometimes done; and now, taking his rebuke in good part, we can assure him that on the present occasion we shall inflict upon him no dissertations, but merely dip into the past, and bring again to the surface things of bygone days, from their numerous hidden and constantly accumulating stores. We hope to set forth some events that will materially bear on the occurrences which this chapter will faintly picture to the reader. We will now mend our pen, and, gathering all our energies, dive into the waters of the past.

We have already carried the reader, in one of our preceding chapters, as far as the close of the night of the ball, and there left the inmates of Wendell Hall to themselves, following the other members of our family, for such the characters of a story become to the author.

The next morning, after a late breakfast, Lady Courtland contrived to be alone in

the drawing-room with Margaret, and at once took her to task for the misdeeds of the previous night, for such did the Countess term the actions of Margaret.

"My dear Margaret, I was astonished beyond expression, last night, at the improper conduct which you were led into by Mr. Morton. How could you for a moment have allowed yourself to accompany him into the conservatory, and remain there no one knows how long? Surely you are old enough to know how imprudent a step you were taking. Had one of my daughters done so I should have fainted from very shame. Your conduct makes me regret that I consented to take the position of hostess."

"My dear aunt, I did not know that there was the least harm in what I was doing; had I thought there was, I should never have done it. This once does not matter, does it?" replied Margaret, supplicatingly.

"Matter, child! I have just told you how indiscreetly you have acted, and you at

once ask me if it matters! Well, for one of your years, you are very cool!" exclaimed the Countess angrily.

"You would not have cared so much if it had been Sir Henry Hargreave instead of Mr. Morton," thought Margaret to herself; but she only said aloud, "I wish you would not be so cross to me, dear aunt. I will never do so again."

As though Lady Courtland had read Margaret's thought, she replied,

"It would not have mattered so much if it had been with Sir Henry, as he is well known, and an intimate friend of the family; but it would not have been the thing even with Sir Henry. I would advise you to think less of this unknown, and more of the Baronet, who would be a husband that any woman might be proud of."

It would be as well to say that Lady Courtland had seen her own daughter, Lady Frances, go into the same conservatory and remain there longer than Margaret had done. This she had seen with pleasure; for she hoped that good results might grow

out of it in the future. Had Margaret done the same thing with a man whom her aunt liked, she would not have received a word of reproach—the subject would never have been mentioned.

We consider that Margaret should not have gone with Mr. Morton, but do not attach the same importance to the act as the Countess did, nor would we regard the circumstance as lightly as she would have done had she not disliked the man.

"I am very sorry, aunt, and will endeavour to act as you direct," said Margaret, kissing the Countess.

"That's a good niece. I intended speaking to your father about it, but as you are so sensible, and see your error, the best thing is let it rest. I never like to have any difficulty." Whereupon she kissed her niece, and they were again friends.

"Now, dear, you had better go out with Frances for a walk before luncheon."

Thus passed this little breeze, but not without leaving some impression, which the future would develope.

The next day Mr. Wilton called and presented Mr. Morton's compliments and excuses for not being able to come himself. The same sun saw Lord Renford and Sir Henry Hargreave drive up the long avenue of oaks and enter the Hall.

The ladies were out in the grounds. The footman offered to fetch them, but the gentlemen, learning their whereabouts, went themselves to search for the ladies. Following the directions of the footman, they walked by the side of the lake until they reached the end, and then turned into a narrow pathway, which soon brought them to the lovely retreat where they had, only the other day, sat down to a sumptuous luncheon with the present occupants of the beautiful grove.

"Good morning, my lord—good morning, Sir Henry!" exclaimed the ladies, as the gentlemen advanced to pay their devoirs.

"We are delighted to see you once more in our grove, but as you have not been working so hard as on the former occasion, there has been no lunch magically

provided for you," said Lady Courtland.

"It seems as though it were by some magic power that the grove has been filled by fairer than the nymphs of other days," replied Sir Henry gallantly, looking with tenderness at Margaret.

"I fear we should make but sorry nymphs, and frighten away the satyrs, which we should have to make you and Lord Renford, to carry out your flattering speech. As, however, we do not think you anything half so horrid, we shall have to yield up our parts, and you will be obliged to content yourselves with plain women," said Margaret, with a sweet smile playing around her lovely mouth.

"Content ourselves! we who have everything to be thankful for, in our present society," replied Lord Renford. "We are delighted to see you in any way," he continued.

"Well, then, you had better make yourselves comfortable, by sitting down," said Lady Courtland.

"I hope, Miss Wendell," said the Baronet,

"that you are none the worse for the ball, as it is sometimes fatiguing to those unused to such things."

"Not at all," answered Margaret; "it was too pleasant to be very tiring, and I do so love dancing."

"You will have enough of that next season, if it should be as gay as the last one was."

"Yes," said the Countess, "it was one of those seasons which occur once in every four or five years, and are peculiarly brilliant, without there being any particular reason for the fact. But why did you not come to my house? Surely our families have been too intimate to stand on such formality. You will not, I hope, make yourself a stranger for the future."

During this time Lady Frances and Lord Renford were making good use of their opportunities, talking away at a vigorous rate.

"So you leave your friend, Sir Henry, to-morrow. He will be very lonely without you; why do you not stay to keep

him company? Surely you can find means to pass away the time pleasantly in the country, can you not; or do you prefer the pleasures of the town?" said Lady Frances with an arch smile.

"He is to go also. It is not that I cannot find pleasure here, and that of the most agreeable nature—for I know of no place where I should enjoy myself more than I could at Brompton Court—but I have engagements which call me to Town; otherwise, I should only be too glad of being so near Wendell Hall."

"That is the way with all men; they are always full of engagements. I have long wondered what they can have to occupy so much of their time. Come, give me some insight into this pressing business of yours. But I must not be curious, for perhaps it is one of those engagements which men enter into so readily and break so unscrupulously," replied Lady Frances archly.

"You are severe on us poor mortals, who spend our lives in your service—at

least most of us do—and you should not throw on the innocent the punishment of the offenders. You must also allow that sometimes the ladies commit the same crime for which you anathematize us," said Lord Renford.

"Well, well, I never saw a man yet who was not a thorough vindicator and defender of his oppressed sex. I will give you the victory. And now to more material and tangible matters. Did you find our ball as pleasant as you said you anticipated it would be? You ought to love dancing, as you are very expert in the art. It is not so often that I find a good partner, so I appreciate it whenever I get one," answered Lady Frances.

"You are kind to praise my humble attempts on the light fantastic toe, but so much depends on the partner one has, that no doubt had I been with a less finished one than yourself, I should not have been so successful. I do not arrogate to myself any of the merit of my success, but attribute it to the proper source," said Lord Renford.

"I will not accept the tribute, so you must keep it, and if you continue wilful in refusing my nice little compliment, I shall be forced to proceed to extremities, and pronounce a ban of excommunication against you as a perverse and obstinate man," replied Lady Frances.

"I must needs submit, as I could never endure such a fate, even if you had the heart to do it," said Lord Renford.

He was now addressed by Sir Henry, who had risen to go.

"Renford, we must be going, hard as it is to tear ourselves from this fairy bower," he said.

In a few minutes the ladies were by themselves again.

"Come, Margaret, give me your opinion of Sir Henry; do you not like him better than you did at first?" asked Lady Courtland.

"I think he is much nicer than he was when I first knew him; he is very different in every way. He is no longer so sarcastic, nor as great a flatterer as for-

merly. Now he is extremely pleasant, at least so far as I can judge from to-day and the latter part of the ball," replied Margaret.

"You will find that time will entirely do away with any unfavourable impressions that you may have formed about him. When you have seen more of him, you will see his good qualities in their right light," answered Lady Courtland.

"Uncle Frank is very fond of Sir Henry, is he not, mamma?" said Lady Frances.

"Yes, very!" replied Lady Courtland. "Nothing would please him better than to see the estates of Brompton Court and Wendell Hall joined together."

This was a bold stroke on the part of Lady Courtland, and intended to let Margaret see that her fate in life had been arranged by her relations, and that any romantic notions she might entertain with respect to Mr. Morton were futile. Had one been watching her face as narrowly as the Countess had done, they would have

seen a sickly pallor spread over her cheeks, and the light fade from her eyes. She strove to speak, but could not.

"That would be delightful—I should then have the dear fellow as a cousin. How jolly to see you married to Sir Henry; and I think that he is rather spoony already—don't you, ma?" said Lady Frances, in great glee.

"I wish that you would not run on like a magpie, Frances. There is no use in touching in that frivolous manner on a subject so interesting and important to our family," replied her mother, who, like a shrewd woman as she was, knew that it is generally unwise to be too hasty in driving an intended victim to bay.

The relations remained for a month longer, and before they left the Earl joined them, and became an inmate of the Hall. We will not, however, at present introduce his lordship, but defer the ceremony until he shall become more useful to the development of our story.

During this time Sir Henry had been a

frequent visitor, being always received with the greatest welcome and kindness by all the inmates of Wendell Hall.

Margaret had, in compliance with her aunt's wishes, and her father's known desires on the subject, made herself as agreeable and courteous as possible, and she now found him a very pleasant and interesting companion. Often did he wander with her and Lady Frances through the park; and on such occasions the governess, who generally accompanied them, was frequently kept in close converse, either by accident or design, by Lady Frances, so that the Baronet and Margaret were alone for the time; and well did he use these precious moments.

At length the Earl and his family departed from the Hall, and all went on after that as formerly, with the difference that Sir Henry had become a constant visitor.

Whenever the name of Mr. Morton had been mentioned, Margaret had studiously avoided showing the least interest in her quondam lover, if such he can be called;

from which the Baronet drew the conclusion he expressed to his mother in our previous chapter, to the effect "that Miss Wendell no longer cared for the stranger."

There Sir Henry had calculated without his host; never was man more mistaken than he, for although Margaret did not by words or deeds display kind remembrance of the absent one, still, deep in her heart, as green as when first planted, flourished the tree of love, stronger and fuller grown than when it first took root in the fruitful soil. It had, indeed, drawn the rosy blood from her fair cheek to nourish it.

Since the parting on the night of the ball, his memory had been cherished by her with fond and tender care. She had hoped that he reciprocated her affection, and had felt a pleasant terror at the idea that no long time would elapse before he would give some decided evidence that this was the case. And now all her maiden shyness could not prevent her wishing that he would, if it were only to put an end to that dreadful idea, which her aunt seemed

resolved to force upon her, that she was irrevocably bound to Sir Henry Hargreave. But even if Mr. Morton loved her, there was another subject for anxiety, for she knew her father to be a man of great pride, who, although he fondly loved her, would not consent to any marriage, unless the person should be in every way eligible as to birth and estate. And then, from her aunt's words, she dreaded that he had already chosen one to lay claim to her hand and fortune.

These feelings often occupied her mind, making miserable the once happy and light-hearted girl, who had never before felt the pangs of uncertainty which now preyed on her young life, drawing from her fair cheeks the rosy hue that health and happiness had placed there.

As time passed slowly away, she became more and more dejected. Since the ball she had not again beheld his face, nor was there much probability that they would ever meet. As these thoughts passed through her mind she felt all the misery of her

position. She would often ask herself, when his image filled her mind, why he should have made himself so agreeable and pleasant—why he made the soft speeches, which she had often listened to with pleasure, and drank into her heart? Could he be like many another, who prey upon her sex, seeking to gain the admiration and even the love of women, for whom they care not, nor even think of, when once out of sight? No, no, she could not bring herself to think thus, but still hoped on.

The old proverb "that hope deferred maketh the heart sick," was exemplified in her case. But as a relief to its despair, her thoughts would often shape themselves into dreams of joy and pleasure, which the morning sun would dispel, bringing back the realities of life in their fulness and strength.

Thus did the time pass slowly on with Margaret, who, to deaden her thoughts, would apply herself more attentively to the duties of the schoolroom and the society of Mademoiselle, who saw with regret the

gathering gloom upon her pupil's brow, and who could but too well understand its cause, for the passing attentions of Mr. Wilton, junior, had produced a strange flutter in the heart of the governess. And now poor Margaret speedily found herself involved in a mesh of deception, for the cordiality which she displayed to Sir Henry, out of deference to her father's wishes, and the coldness which she could not help sometimes showing towards him, made her appear, even in the world-wise eyes of Sir Henry, as a most exquisitely wicked, loving and loveable coquette.

We will now give the reader some scraps of a conversation which occurred about this time between Margaret and Mr. Wendell in the library, where Mr. Wendell generally passed his time, either in reading some favourite author, or writing out his views on subjects to which he had given much time and research. These subjects were oftentimes reviews of the lives of eminent personages, who had distinguished themselves in the field or cabinet. He was at this

time engaged in placing on paper his views of the character, times, and greatness of the grand monarch of France, Louis Quatorze. In treating this weighty and tangled matter, Mr. Wendell displayed much mental acumen and deep study of the monarch's life, the troublesome, agitated, and unsettled times of this reign.

There was one important point in the history of those times on which he dwelt with erudition, throwing on it all the light which could be procured from the annals of the past. That point was the identity of the man in the iron mask, and upon whom the mournful honour should be conferred—a point very difficult and almost impossible to decide. But as we are engaged in a simple story, we will not wander into the deep waters of obscure history and dark chronicles, but leave it to the able historian.

As Mr. Wendell and his daughter were one day seated in this scene of his labours, after conversing on different topics, he said:

"Margaret, how do you like Sir Henry?

—a handsome young man, is he not? I find him very pleasant and agreeable."

"Very well," replied Margaret; "he seems to be very nice, but one can never tell what people are—they change so suddenly with circumstances. From what I have seen of him, I should say that he was as good as the rest of the world."

"I don't know whether you mean it," observed Mr. Wendell, "but in speaking thus you are inflicting upon him the most severe censure."

"You mistake me, papa; I did not mean to say anything against him. You know that I am not able to judge as you are, who have seen the world, and know all about it."

"You are right, my dear child. I have, of course, seen much of life, but that was long ago. Since the death of your mother, I have seldom left this place, and may be as much a novice in the present ways of the world as yourself. The experience of former times might, perhaps, be more detrimental than otherwise, if applied to the

present. There is one wish that I have long cherished, which is the joining of the estate of Wendell Hall with that of Brompton Court; but we will speak of that hereafter, as I am busy now," he continued, and he turned to his desk to go on with his work.

At this Margaret arose, and returned to the school-room, where we found her at the beginning of this chapter.

We will now leave her there, until we again enter the old Hall, accompanied by one of our friends.

Good-bye, Margaret, for the present; do not let despondency sit so heavily on thy heart; brush away the sorrowful clouds that gather around thy peerless brow; bid thy fainting courage to take new life, and be thyself once more. Adieu, adieu, loved one.

CHAPTER V.

THE INTERVIEW BETWEEN FATHER AND LOVER.

THE following day again finds us on our way to Wendell Hall, but this time in company with Sir Henry Hargreave, who looks bent on a purpose. He has determined that the day's sun shall not go down in the red west without first seeing accomplished the resolve which he arrived at yesterday, after mature consideration.

As he was seated on his dog-cart, he was indeed a man of no mean attractions, possessing much manly beauty. Although he was not tall, no one would ever for a moment consider him to be insignificant, for he possessed all the attributes of manliness—strength of body and mind, with a

determined and unyielding nature stamped on all his lineaments, whilst his broad brow was worthy of the coronet which he was one day to wear.

As he entered the gate which led to the hall through the long avenues of trees, he became more and more firm in his purpose. The thought of one day being lord of this broad domain nerved him to the onset, and bade his anxious mind still itself. He had, before becoming heir to the ancient earldom of Merwyn and its wide estates, considered his chances of success as very good; and now that he could, with every other inducement, lay at Margaret's feet his future title and immense wealth, he flattered his hope with success, not dreaming of failure. How could a young man who had only yesterday been raised from the depths of despair to the high heaven of joy, how could he, we again say, look upon any attempt, and much less the one he was on the point of testing, with any other eye than that of confidence?

Such were the feelings of the Baronet as he neared the old mansion under whose roof

he was that day to learn whether his good angel would still befriend him, by refusing him the object of his passion, or, by allowing him to grasp it, leave him to plunge into the very depths of sin.

We will enter before Sir Henry, and glance at the inmates.

Mr. Wendell is, as usual, in the library; and in fact we do not remember having seen him out of this, his literary retreat, more than half a dozen times since our story opened itself. Margaret was in the drawing-room, conversing with Mademoiselle.

At this moment there was a ring at the front-door bell; a firm manly tread was heard in the hall, and the library door opened and closed.

"Good morning, Sir Henry," exclaimed Mr. Wendell, as the Baronet shook him warmly by the hand. "You are always a welcome visitor. Somehow I looked for you to-day. Come, sit down. How did you leave your excellent mother and Lady Hargreave?—they are both well, I hope?

"Perfectly, my grandmother is in the best

of health; she is really surprising for so old a person."

Mr. Wendell sat down in his arm-chair, and Sir Henry drew one close beside him, and seated himself.

"You must have found it very cold driving—will you not have a glass of wine?"

With this Mr. Wendell rang the bell, which was answered by a footman, who retired and soon re-appeared with the wine, of which both the gentlemen partook with evident satisfaction.

"Yes, it was very cold, the air is very chilly. It is one of those clear, cold and frosty atmospheres which penetrate through the thickest clothing, making it impossible to keep thoroughly warm," replied the Baronet.

"You do not read much while you are in the country, I suppose? Eh!—Too much bothered by agents and farm bailiffs and troublesome tenants? For my own part, reading has become with me almost a vice, and tempted me, I fear, to neglect some of those duties which devolve upon every man of property. I could not exist without giving a

certain portion of the twenty-four hours to reading, studying, and writing, so completely have I become the slave of what may be called a passion."

"I cannot say that I go so far as that, but nevertheless I devote a good deal of my time to literary pursuits," answered Sir Henry, seeing his friend's hobby. "I have not, since leaving college, lost sight of my studies, but have found pleasure in keeping them up. How I envy your quiet retirement among so many old friends which I see on the shelves. The library at Brompton Court is by no means what it should be; I shall be glad of some hints from you as to the best means of replenishing it."

Sir Henry was here exaggerating. It is true that he was very fond of reading, and that of a solid nature, but his literary zeal did not carry him as far as he wished to lead Mr. Wendell to believe. Nevertheless, it served his purpose, and all went well. He had taken his cue from Lady Harriet, and knew that the surest road to success was to ingratiate himself with the father.

"I shall be delighted to do so; but I should be sorry to see you become a book-worm. You are too young a man for that; there are many years of life to pass over your head before you can settle yourself gently down as I have done, unless some similar affliction should tear you from the world, to mourn, sorrow, and seek for forgetfulness of misery, which, though long passed, can never be erased from the tablets of memory, where it is indelibly written."

Here Mr. Wendell paused and sighed. The past still pressed on his heart; time had not yet blunted, nor never could it, the sharpness of his grief. The grave only would relieve him from its bitter sting, after which he hoped that heaven might restore to him the lost treasure which it had held for so many long and dreary years.

"True, very true; yours has been indeed a trial hard to bear. My mother has often spoken of it with tears in her eyes. We young people little know how

to appreciate the sorrows which older ones suffer. My three cousins, sons of Lord Mervyn, were lost at sea some few days since. He, poor man! is inconsolable; nothing can reconcile him to the loss," answered the Baronet.

Mr. Wendell was strongly affected by this intelligence in various ways; for whilst, as a most kind-hearted man, he was deeply shocked at hearing of such a catastrophe, it made him look upon Sir Henry with far different eyes. He had always wished (since Robert's disappearance) that his daughter should marry the Baronet; but now he felt that if she did not it would be a grievous disappointment to himself. Mr. Wendell was not so indifferent to worldly things as he thought.

Sir Henry explained all he knew about the matter, and added,

"And now I am the only surviving heir of the house of Hargreave, and should I die without issue, the family would become extinct."

"That would be a pity; you ought to

marry at once. Time is precious on such occasions; no delay should be indulged in. It would never do to allow your ancient family to become lost to the aristocracy of England. Alas! mine will end in the male line with me! No longer shall a direct heir bear the name of Wendell!"

"Surely you would have your daughter's husband take your name, in addition to his own. There are none who would not be proud of bearing the time-honoured and illustrious name of Wendell," said Sir Henry.

This was a good hit, and Mr. Wendell, much gratified, replied,

"I have often thought of that myself, and intend arranging it should Margaret marry during my life, and also of leaving instructions in my will to have it carried into effect should I not live to see my fondest wishes consummated."

"You will not have long to wait. As soon as she is once before the world, you will only have to choose among the numbers who will offer themselves," said Sir Henry.

"Yes, Margaret is very pretty, I know; but she will have that which possesses far greater attractions for many than her beauty —her fortune; and I fear that that will be snapped at by many a designing man."

"There is no doubt of that. So large an estate as she will some day have (God grant that it may be far distant) is sure to draw upon her the longing eye of fortune-hunters, who infest society, preying upon its vitals," replied the Baronet.

"I should never consent to my daughter's throwing herself away on such men. No, the one who leads her to the altar must have unblemished and high-born birth, with a suitable fortune to support it. I am not disposed to see Margaret Wendell wedded to a low-born beggar. No, no, if I am the last of the male line of my family, my son-in-law must not sully its blood."

We here see this generally quiet man aroused by the thought of his family pride, which was to him dearer than life. He would sooner have seen his loved and cherished child laid in her grave, than

married to a man beneath her. There is no feeling so strong as the pride of blood. It has the firmest hold on the human heart, and to it all other desires must yield and be subservient. How often have we seen the warmest and most devoted hearts turned to stone by the chilling influence of outraged pride and humbled greatness. How many fond fathers, and devoted mothers, have turned a deaf ear to the entreaties of a wayward child, who has listened only to the whispering and desires of its love, forgetting its station. There is much to admire in this feeling when displayed in moderation, but few things more despicable when held as an impassable barrier to love and life. Sir Henry saw with pleasure the high and haughty will of the man whom he hoped would soon be his father-in-law. In him he saw the successful termination of his plans. He trusted and almost felt convinced that Mr. Morton could not bring forward any pretensions which could be placed side by side with his own. Suppose, even, that

Margaret loved this stranger, and that he was well-born (which the Baronet doubted), and was rich, what would that signify, when compared with his future Earldom, and enormous wealth? No, no, they would not stand a moment before the preponderance of his claims. He felt his own dignity, and considered that he was conferring an honour in offering to Miss Wendell his future prospects, and, with such feelings, felt secure in his hopes.

Margaret, we tremble for you; unless some good spirit interferes, your fate is sealed, your hand will have to go where your heart is not. Little do you think of that which is passing in the library, or else thou wouldst not chat so glibly to Mademoiselle in her native tongue, but be preparing thyself for the coming event, which will soon burst on you.

We will now listen to Sir Henry, who is on the point of laying his wishes before Mr. Wendell.

"There is a wish which I have long entertained, but until now have not had the

courage to express," said the Baronet.

"What is that?—is it anything that I can assist you in?" said Mr. Wendell, rather anxiously, for he had a suspicion of what Sir Henry was about to say.

"It is a favour which I have to ask from you—one which you will, I fear, not yield without a sigh. I hardly dare allow words to indicate my meaning. You will excuse my agitation when you know the cause."

"You need not rest under any apprehensions, as there is nothing which I would not willingly grant to the son of my old and esteemed friend Sir Harold. Come, my dear Sir Henry, do not fear a refusal."

"As you are so kind, I will at once ask from you the greatest boon you have to confer, and that is, your daughter's hand in marriage. I wish the honour of your alliance, and pray that, now you know the extent of my hopes, you will not refuse me. I have loved Miss Wendell from the time we first met, some months since. The passion has grown stronger and stronger,

until I can no longer control it, and ask that you will grant me the inestimable privilege of paying my addresses to the object of my affections. It is not for her large fortune that I seek to win her as my wife, but for herself alone, as she is an invaluable prize to any man. I know of no woman who would so grace the position which the future will give me, or lend more dignity to the ancient coronet of Merwyn. I am perfectly willing, and wish to add to my name that of Wendell."

At this he stopped, and looked eagerly at Mr. Wendell, ready to drink up the words which might flow from the father's mouth.

Mr. Wendell seemed deeply moved and agitated, but they were pleasurable emotions which stirred his heart. He had not for years listened to anything which gave him so much delight as this proposal of the Baronet.

"My dear Sir Henry," he said, as he clasped him by the hand, "your words fill

me with unalloyed happiness. I expected and hoped for this; it has been a dream of mine through many a long year, to see our families united, and it is with gratification that I now see it so near its fulfilment. There is no man to whom I would have trusted my daughter's happiness sooner than to you. It is you who have conferred an honour on my house by the proposal. I most freely and joyfully give my consent, and trust that you will find Margaret as willing as I am."

"Thank you! thank you!" exclaimed the Baronet; "you have given me new life—I now feel strong and able to sue for your daughter's love. This will be pleasant news to my mother, who has often mentioned it with hope. It was my father's greatest desire, to see consummated this event, to the accomplishment of which you so kindly give me your assistance. It shall be no fault of mine if I do not succeed in realizing my dearest hopes," said Sir Henry.

"There is no fear of that, I think.

When a girl is not pre-engaged in her likings, she does not throw away such an offer as you can make. You will find her a good wife. From her infancy she has been my constant care. Her mother dying at her birth, the sole charge of Margaret devolved on me; but although she has never known the influence and care of a mother's love, still she has been strictly guarded, and all that could be done to supply that dreadful loss has been done, and, as far as I can judge, the solicitude of which she has been the object has not been without good results. I have always found her to be a loving and dutiful child, preferring to sacrifice her own wishes to mine. I may be deceived, I may look through partial eyes, which are blind to the failings of my own child, but I am quite certain that they are not deceived when they see in her so much that is good," replied Mr. Wendell.

"They are not; your daughter is all that you think her to be—she has no equal. Never have I beheld one more

deserving a father's praises than she. Your words do but faintly picture her goodness. There is not another woman living who could inspire me with the same love and esteem as Miss Wendell does. Have I your consent to commence my delightful task at once, or would you prefer me to wait any time? Say what you would like best, and I will readily comply."

"There is no time like the present—you need make no delay, but press your suit at once. The sooner the thing is settled the better I shall like it. Women do not dislike an adventurous knight—they despise a laggard."

"I will now take my leave of you, as I see you were engaged in some writing when I came in, and would like, no doubt, to continue it," said the Baronet.

"Ha! ha! Sir Henry, I see it all; I was just the same myself when young. You will find Margaret in the drawing-room, and, if not, the footman will call her. Good-bye, I will not detain you any longer.

The father is poor company in the library when the daughter is in the drawing-room. Ha! ha! ha! Sir Henry, I feel young again in you. You have my best wishes!"

"Good-bye, Mr. Wendell," said Sir Henry, shaking hands.

He was nearly out of the room, when he was called back by his host, who asked him to return after the interview, to communicate the result of the meeting.

CHAPTER VI.

THE UNEXPECTED AND UNWELCOME PROPOSAL.

WE will now return to the drawing-room. Seated in a chair near the window, with a book of Scott's poems in her hand, attentively reading the "Lady of the Lake," in which she seemed very much interested, was Margaret. Every now and then she would raise her eyes from the page, and glance through the plate-glass of the window into the park beyond, which stretched itself far away, until the eye lost itself in the maze of trees which upreared themselves in every direction. The lovely lake lay before her in all its beauty, and it was on that that her gaze was especially fixed; for deep water is like the future in this, that it conceals so many things.

Did the sight of this beautiful expanse of water bring to her mind thoughts of other days? Did she compare the present, so cold and cheerless, to the past, with its bright and sunny days, when all nature was arrayed in its most enticing habiliments? Perhaps she is musing over the book? She may be at that part of the poem where Ellen meets the stranger, and thinks to see a boat glide over her own fair lake, that she thus gazes upon it?

No, it is merely abstraction; it is not any particular purpose which causes her to raise her looks from off the book.

When there is any subject which occupies and weighs on the mind, to the exclusion of most other matters, it brings on a certain mental disease generally known as abstraction, which obtrudes itself upon those who are afflicted in this manner at all times, irrespective of what may be at the moment the chief weight on the mind.

Such was the condition of Margaret's mind. The subject which caused it was the love she entertained for Mr. Morton.

It preyed on her young life, and although her mind was too well balanced to allow any morbid feeling to dominate it, this love would ever and anon cause an interruption in each and all of her occupations.

Margaret, as we have already said, was reading one of Sir Walter Scott's poems, and we will here take the liberty of making some remarks on that author's poetry.

It has been said by some that Sir Walter Scott was not a poet; on what grounds they base their reasons for such a decision is to us unknown. Should we hear them we fear that we should prove obstinate in our loyalty to the poet. Nothing could ever shake our love and admiration for those poems, which join the present civilization to the past warlike times of Highland life. To bring forward a portion of one of these poems as an illustration of poetical beauty, we would refer our readers to that part of the "Lady of the Lake" in which comes the description of Ellen Douglas, and leave

them to form their own opinion, without fear of their disagreeing with us.

As Margaret was thus engaged, the door opened, and in walked Sir Henry Hargreave, who approached her with looks of love playing in every feature. We will here do Sir Henry justice by saying, that no matter what may have been his first motives in seeking the hand of Miss Wendell, he now undoubtedly loved her with a fierce and burning passion, which, unless gratified, would turn on himself with terrible vigour. It was not the true pure love of an honest and upright heart, but born of ungovernable desire, which dooms the object it wishes to possess.

"Good morning, Miss Wendell. I am unfortunate this morning—I have just interrupted a grave student, and now I interfere with the studies of a fair one."

"You are kind to take so long a drive on so cold a day to give us the pleasure of a call. Pray be seated," she continued, as she resumed her seat, still mechanically holding her book.

"I see you have been reading from Scott's

poems—which of them, may I ask? They are all beautiful, but some possess more merit than others; which is your favourite?"

"I was perusing the 'Lady of the Lake,' which is my favourite among the many loved ones."

"It is mine also. I seldom, if ever, see the book unless I turn involuntarily to it. Are you a lover of most poetry, or is your admiration limited to a few chosen friends from the many bards?" said the Baronet.

"Naturally, I have my preferences, but I like most of the poets. Of course, there are some for whom I do not much care. One who has found a place in my affections is the American, Longfellow; there is much musical sweetness and delicate sentiment in every line he writes."

"He is, indeed," answered Sir Henry, "a man who has touched the key-note of human nature, and not more so in his poetry than in his prose. Through all his poems there runs a soft and gentle tenderness, which appeals directly and strongly to the feelings. Love is the subject, which he treats with the

greatest skill, filling the reader with the meaning of his words, making melodious and elevated the fascinations of the silken network of his story. He carries us with him on the pure and ever-flowing stream of a glorious fancy, which vibrates through the heart, and places it in memory as a spring of never-ending delight. Would that I could, in words, pour forth the feelings of my heart as Longfellow does the sentiments of his imagination—there then might be some hope; but alas! I am not gifted with that sublime and poetical nature, which breaks down many of the barriers of reality with its fanciful and insidious workings."

This speech was accompanied by a look of devotion and despair, that made Margaret feel a sympathy for him, although she trembled at his words.

Would he, she thought, stop here, or would he continue? She hoped that the former might be the case, and determined to give him no encouragement.

"I agree in all your sentiments in regard to the beauty of Longfellow's poems. Poetry

is, no doubt, the seal of love, at least I should think so. One would, of course, be better able to judge if one had experienced the latter. I wonder how Longfellow himself would succeed in love-making. No doubt his poetry would all vanish before the agitation of his feelings, if they were true and sincere. The result would probably be, that he would stammer out the old time-worn sentence, 'I love you,' and wait with dreadful anxiety for the deciding answer, which was to fill him with delight, or dash his hopes to the ground. I can almost fancy that I see him now on his knees before some fair girl; he young and poetical, she cold and unpoetical—the old time-out-of-mind declaration trembling on his lips, while 'No' falls from hers! Do you not think the picture amusing?" said Margaret, laughing heartily.

She spoke in this light bantering tone in the hope that she might thus prevent the Baronet from proceeding any further on the unpleasant mission on which she knew he had come. If such, however, was her in-

tention, it failed of its end. Sir Henry was not to be deterred from his purpose.

"You are cruel thus to speak so sarcastically of a poet's wooing. His would be a condition which ought to obtain sympathy, or at least forgetfulness of the bard in compassion for the lover. Have you never listened with interest to the poetical sentences of some one not a poet—have they never excited in you feelings of pleasure, or have you not been thrown into companionship with any one possessing that peculiar nature?" replied Sir Henry blandly.

He narrowly watched Margaret's face, and saw her cheeks suffused with a warm blush, which she in vain tried to repress. Her heart had heard the soft impeachment, and sent the conscious blood in tell-tale floods through every vein. Conquering, however, almost at once, the emotions which the pointed speech of the Baronet had given rise to, she replied,

"My acquaintance with people has been so limited, that I do not think that I have come in contact with any—unless, indeed,

Sir Henry, you are yourself one of the few inspired ones!" Margaret uttered these last words with a little, almost coquettish laugh; and then, suddenly changing her humour, added, "How is your friend, Lord Renford—is he still in Town? Some men are fond of London all the year round, I have heard, while others cannot bear it, even during the season. Of which class are you?"

"He is very well, I believe. I have not heard from him for some time. As for your last question, I think that both country and town life have their attractions, different in their nature, but equally enjoyable. I like to partake of the pleasures of each. Town in the season has its balls, operas, and theatres, its crowds of friends and acquaintances, and a constant round of gaiety, which never allows one time to dwell on sorrow; whilst the country has its beautiful summer, when all Nature is dressed out in her gayest and most joyous attire, and, in winter, gives us shooting and hunting. You, I believe, prefer country life exclu-

sively, never having known any other?"

"I must confess my weakness for this dear old place; but as every one tells me that I shall change, I suppose it will be the case."

"Miss Wendell," said Sir Henry, "I beg that you will not be offended at what I am about to say. I have restrained as long as possible the current of my feelings, but unless they are allowed an outlet, they will overwhelm me with their fulness. From the time I first caught a glimpse of your lovely face my fate was sealed—I loved you with all the strength of my nature. Every look or smile of yours sank deep into my heart, there to add another block to the fabric of my love. Every word which dropped from your beautiful mouth fell on my ear as dew on thirsty flowers, which my soul drank up with delight, and which created an ever-flowing spring of hope, from which I have drawn my every pleasure since knowing you. Whenever I beheld those lustrous eyes turned with softness on another, my spirit felt all the pain

of a hundred deaths, my soul grew sick within me, and I wished that I were dead. Whenever those lips spoke too sweetly to another, my heart was heavy and full to bursting. You will say that I was wild and foolish, but if you had ever felt the maddening fire of new-born love course through your veins in the tumultuous and burning stream of jealousy, which wears away the young life as it sweeps onward in its deathlike haste, then, and only then, could you sympathise with my own pent-up desires and fears mingled together in the ever-changing and shifting sands of love. Every new meeting has added strength to my devotion, until I now adore and worship you as the angel of my existence. The days are spent in thought of you—your image is never dim, but ever bright in the sunlight of happy memory. I only sleep to dream, and my dreams do but fill my brain with one object, pure and holy, and that is yourself. I awake to think, and sleep to dream, and both thought and dream are the same, for they

are of you. I fear, I tremble, I dare not demand your answer, so terrible would be a refusal. I pray that you will not lightly consider my offer; I lay at your feet my hand, my heart, and fortune, and I entreat you to believe that they are but small testimonies of the love I bear you. Do not doom me to despair—do not inflict on me a pang which would be more dreadful than death itself, for there would be no light beyond—all would be dark, drear, and desolate, without a hope or wish to live."

Here the Baronet finished his impassioned speech, and gazed with imploring eyes, and face flushed with excitement, on Margaret, who had remained rooted to her seat, pale, trembling, fearful of what to say, for she saw that there was no means of evading the direct and awful question.

Perplexed and full of sorrow, she endeavoured to frame some reply, but her tongue refused to do its office, and she remained silent and agitated.

"May I hope—may I construe your silence into an assent?" said Sir Henry, as he would have clasped her hand in his own.

"No, no! Why will you compel me to speak!" she said, drawing back her hand. "I cannot nor do I love you—you must not hope. You afflict me beyond words. I cannot return your devotion, or even affection, in the least degree. You make me unhappy by your speech. Forget, forget it all—tear me from your heart, where some other more worthy of your devotion may one day reign."

"You have not decided—you will not remain ever thus. May I not hope that time will soften your heart? You will relent; you must not say No," replied the Baronet, in the most despairing voice.

"It would be only deceiving you, if I should bid you hope. It is impossible for me to entertain any other feeling but that of friendship, which I shall always entertain for you. I am certain that I never gave you any encouragement to induce you to believe

that I held you as ought else than a friend."

"Oh! Miss Wendell! do not forget that you have it in your power to make or unmake the man before you. Will you destroy his future, casting him on the world a wreck, ruined and heart-broken; or will you not, by consenting, make him the proud husband of your love, happy and joyous? And will you, may I add, lightly reject the coronet and title which would so worthily crown your beauty?"

"Sir Henry, had I yielded to your most flattering offer, it would have been for yourself, not your title. I well know the value the world sets on these proud appellations, and do myself consider them in their true light; but I must say that, when weighed in the balance with love, they are found wanting. I wish that you would let the subject rest here, as it is useless to carry it further. You are striving against hope."

This was said in a decided and firm voice, calculated to put an end to the discussion. Margaret had mustered all her firmness to bear on it; she was fearfully agitated, but,

by great and strenuous efforts, succeeded in concealing her emotions; she appeared outwardly calm and composed, whilst inwardly she was a prey to contending feelings.

Sir Henry had, in his last speech, played his best card and lost; but he had no intention of tamely yielding up his purpose. Everything combined to urge him on—love, interest, and pride. To be refused by any woman would have been bitter and humbling to his proud spirit, but when the refusal came from Margaret it was too much for his nature to endure; he still intended making one more appeal to her feelings.

"Think once more, do not be too hasty in your decision. I must make one more effort to soften your heart; I cannot give up the only woman whom I ever loved without making strenuous appeals. Tell me that I may hope, say that some future day may bring success to my desires?"

With this the Baronet hid his face in his hand, and awaited the answer.

"It is needless for me to reiterate my former reply. Once for all, I do not, nor

can I ever love you. This is my final answer, which I cannot change."

This was too much for the Baronet's feelings; they began to change from tenderness into anger. His wounded pride smarted under the rejection, and had now gained a mastery over him. This new condition of Sir Henry's mind soon forced him to speak far differently from what he had been doing for the last half-hour.

"If your heart were not already engaged, my prayer might have been listened to. You love the stranger; he is the possessor of your affections. You are devoting yourself to a man who cares for you only as the plaything of an idle hour. Mr. Morton has, no doubt, long since forgotten the passing fancy which amused him for the time, in the society of some newer conquest, which will in its turn be as carelessly cast aside!" said the Baronet in an angry and excited voice.

During this insolent speech the eyes of Margaret flashed fire; she rose from her seat,

and drawing herself up to her full height, with all the pride and hauteur of an insulted woman, replied,

"Your words, Sir Henry, make me rejoice in my own decision. You have no right to thus insult me, nor have you any reason for your unworthy remarks. Whether or not I love Mr. Morton, it is nothing to you. I am surprised that you should so far forget common politeness as to openly and grossly offer me such an indignity. The sooner you take your leave the better I shall be pleased. My father would be astonished at such conduct!"

"Ha! ha! ha! the arrow found its mark; I thought it would bring out the truth! So, my offended one, you confess to the soft impeachment! I think your father would be astonished did he know the cause of your refusal of my offer How would the proud Mr. Wendell relish the fact that his daughter loves a man who is a mere adventurer in society?" This was said with a bitter sneer.

"He will not support you in your in-

sults," replied Margaret, who was now very much at a loss to know what to say, and could with difficulty restrain her tears.

"This morning your father gave me his consent to the marriage, and will remain true to his word," said Sir Henry with an insolent air.

"I do not believe this, Sir Henry; it is merely a subterfuge of your own to deceive me. He would never barter me away without first consulting my feelings on the subject—no, no, he is too fond of me for that!"

"You will soon see. He is now in the library awaiting my return, to learn the result of my interview. You had better go and ask him, as you doubt my word."

"Surely," said Margaret, who began to tremble, "you would not force me to marry you, even if my father should wish it? No gentleman would be guilty of such an act!"

"I cannot yield you up—anything would be preferable to that. You *must* be my wife."

"We will not discuss the matter any longer, but wait until time and force shall compel me to resume it with you," replied Margaret with a haughty air.

"No, you mistake me, Miss Wendell. I do not wish to use any unfair means in urging my suit, but I am compelled to use all the means in my power to gain so great a prize as you," answered the Baronet, in his most winning voice.

"You are going the wrong way to work to make me entertain feelings other than those of dislike," she replied.

"Point out to me the path that I am to pursue, so as to arrive at the happy end."

"There is no way by which you can gain my love, but there *is* one by which you may retain the friendship I had formed for you," said Margaret.

"Pray what may that be?" asked the Baronet.

"If you entirely change your course, and never refer to the subject which we have

been discussing—by that means you may still be my friend," she said.

"It is a cold word which you offer me instead of love. I cannot accept it. Give me your heart or nothing. What shall it be?" he continued, as he would again have attempted to take her hand.

During the latter part of the conversation, Sir Henry had recovered entire control of his feelings, and was now speaking in a cool, sarcastic manner.

"Then, Sir Henry, I must leave you to your own company. I can no longer listen to your remarks, which are, to say the least, unbecoming a gentleman and would-be lover. You may use what means you like, but you will find that my love can never be yours."

Saying this, she bowed stiffly to the Baronet, left the room, and hurried to her own chamber, there to give way to the contending feelings which had agitated her during the interview.

Sir Henry saw her leave the room and

made not an effort to prevent her. He saw that her love was not to be had, and determined to pay his court to the father instead of the daughter, for in him, he knew, lay his power. He paced the room for a few minutes, reflecting what was now the best course to pursue, and his thoughts were something after the following style:

"Hum! she refuses me. I might have known that she loved Mr. Morton. May he be accursed! How I hate him! I wonder if she thought that I did not see the cause of her refusal? Well, well, I must make the best of it, and do what I can to shape the affair to a proper end. I will now go back to the father, and see how he likes his daughter's conduct. I hope that she has not gone straight to him and appealed to his fondness, before I have a chance. There are a few hints which I wish to drop judiciously into his ear, which I think will open his eyes to some of Miss Wendell's partialities. Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed quietly, "you will find that Sir

Henry Hargreave is not to be trifled with!"

Soliloquising thus, he proceeded in the direction of the library.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PATERNAL REBUKE.

MR. WENDELL had remained in the library during the interview between Sir Henry and his daughter, and, as usual, he would have appeared to a casual observer to have been buried in his books. But it is quite certain that he was not so much absorbed in the one he was reading as he would have been at former times. Ever and anon he would raise his eyes from the page and cast an anxious look towards the door through which, our readers will remember, our friend the Baronet disappeared some little time before. Mr. Wendell was anxious to learn the result of the meeting. He was, as a father, naturally very desirous that his daughter should

marry well, for whilst he knew that her undoubted beauty and known expectations would bring numbers of men to her feet, he was anxious to see her safely in the possession of one whom he knew and trusted.

There are in this world many who are justly called fortune-hunters, who are on the look-out for every heiress who makes her *début* on the stage of life. Mr. Wendell knew it full well, and trembled. Those not very creditable persons number among their body men of great personal and mental attractions, and are to be truly dreaded by all parents who have children sufficiently rich to draw on them the undesirable notice of these cormorants of society.

For these reasons, Mr. Wendell wished, if possible, to see his child engaged to a man known to himself before she was launched into the whirlpool of London society, which sweeps its votaries onward in its career, and often engulphs them in its vortex. Such a man had this very day offered his hand to

Margaret. This man, Sir Henry Hargreave, was all that he could have desired—high-born, rich, and heir to an earldom.

The fond and loving father had decided that Margaret should wed this man, forgetting in his age that his heart had once been young, and had beaten devotedly for one who had long since gone to another and better world. These things were all forgotten in his desire to carry out his wishes.

Why is it that years, as they roll over our heads, should render us unmindful of the past, or at least make us unwilling to do unto our children as we should have wished our parents to do unto us? Is it that we become more wise, as time furrows our brow and sprinkles our hair with silver; that we have learned from the teachings of age, the wisdom of the past; and that we see with clearer eyes things as follies which in our youth did seem as rightful pleasure? Or is it that the blood becomes thinner and colder, making the desires of youth distasteful and uncared for? The latter is no doubt the cause why satiated and frozen age points with the finger

of scorn at the genial flow of life's opening years. It cannot see without denouncing the pleasure into which it once did dip with all the eagerness of high and overflowing spirits. We sometimes see such exceptions to this general rule as to induce us to believe that the best elements of youth can never die. It is a most glorious sight to see the old man—who does not follow in the beaten track of his ancestors and companions—to see in him the recollection of youthful joys springing up in his bosom, mirroring on his face their sweetness, and associating him with a younger age.

But we must now return to Mr. Wendell, who will, we fear, demonstrate to the world the fact, that he is true to the prejudices of age. He was shortly roused from the perusal of his book by the door opening, and as Sir Henry entered, Mr. Wendell did not like the look of his friend, for it denoted a want of success. He inquired with an anxious voice the result of the interview, and being told by the Baronet, who did not fail to paint his own part in the interview in glowing colours,

he became stern and thoughtful, and still more so when Sir Henry hinted his suspicions about Margaret's attachment to the stranger, whom she had met but a few times. He could not at first credit the statement; but on greater deliberation, fell into the conviction that his daughter loved Mr. Morton; and as this idea gained more strength, and became as it did a settled belief, his anger was kindled against the fondest object of his love, the hope of his life. He then gave the Baronet to understand that he need have no fear as to the result. In fact, he pledged his word that Margaret should be his; and then Sir Henry, after many expressions of gratitude to Mr. Wendell, withdrew. As soon as the lover was out of the house, the angered father rang the bell, which was immediately answered by a footman, to whom he said—

"John, tell Miss Wendell that I wish to see her in the library."

"Yes, sir," replied the footman, who indulged in a remark which appears to be the chief solace of domestic servitude, and is simply "something's up."

John not finding his young mistress in the drawing-room, told her maid, who at once went to Margaret's chamber, and gave the message from the outside of the door, as the occupant of the room was too much afflicted with grief to allow the maid to enter.

When Margaret had left Sir Henry, she at once went to her room, and gave herself up to grief and tears. The events of the past hour had agitated her beyond measure, and she in vain strove to soothe her feelings with that feminine opium—tears. When Sir Henry first asserted that her father's consent had been already given to a marriage, which would be death in life, she had disbelieved him, but his confident air soon gave her cause to receive the terrible tidings as truth. She had expected, with trembling anticipation, to be summoned to her father's presence. How could she tell him that her love for another was the cause of her refusing the offer of the Baronet? No, that would never do. She must throw herself on the

compassion and kindness of her ever-loving parent. But now the awful thought burst on her like a thunderbolt—might not her rejected lover drop a hint of his suspicions to him? Terrible, terrible idea!—she feared it would turn her tender and yielding father into stone. There was nothing more capable of affecting him than his ancestral pride, which she knew he cherished with the most steadfast devotion.

Such as the foregoing were the musings of Margaret, with which were freely intermingled her tears. When the dreaded knock came, it brought her heart into her throat. She answered, and awaited with suspense for the message which was to summon her to the much-feared audience. She hastily endeavoured to conceal the evidences of her sorrow, but failed to hide the swollen eyes and haggard look, which the last half-hour of unrestrained grief had left. When she entered the library, her father motioned her to a chair, which she took, and then said,

"Margaret, Sir Henry Hargreave has just left me, and I am very sorry to hear that you received his attentions in so unfavourable a manner. The hints which I dropped sometime since must have faded from your mind?"

"I have not forgotten them, papa."

"Then why did you act as you did?"

"I could not help saying what I did," replied Margaret.

"Why not?"

"Because I could not love him," faltered Margaret.

"How did you know that you could not learn to love him in time?"

"I know I could never love him, papa. No, never, never!"

"Young girls are not so apt to take decided objections to a man, even if they are inclined to fall into sudden fancies," said Mr. Wendell.

This was a home-thrust, and Margaret felt it in all its force. She turned pale and red alternately, and hardly dared to trust herself to answer.

Mr. Wendell watched closely the face of his daughter, and thought he detected in her agitation the truth of the Baronet's suspicions.

"What would you have me do?—surely not accept a man whom I could not love?"

"That would soon come. Sir Henry is not a man that a woman could help caring for, if she were married to him," replied her father.

"But, papa, would it not be better to love first and then marry; not marry first, and then learn to love?"

"Had your heart been free, Margaret, you would have done otherwise."

"What do you mean, papa?" said Margaret, making a superhuman effort to speak.

"Mean? you know well enough what I mean!" replied Mr. Wendell, sternly.

She continued silent, and he added:

"A countess's coronet is not to be had for the asking, that you should throw it away so foolishly when offered, preferring an unknown stranger, who may be very well in his way, but not a fitting mate for a Wendell."

"I see, papa, that Sir Henry Hargreave has told you of his unworthy suspicions! I had a higher opinion of him than that. I did not suppose that any gentleman would so demean himself as to turn tale-bearer," replied Margaret, with scorn and contempt flashing from her eyes.

"You misjudge the Baronet—he merely answered some questions which I put to him about the matter," said Mr. Wendell. "And now, Margaret," he continued, "you must tell me the reason why you refused the offer of the man I wish to see your husband. Do you or do you not love some one else, and is not that other Mr. Morton? Come, I must have the whole truth of the matter."

Margaret hesitated for some moments, to collect her thoughts and consider the best course to pursue. She feared to confess the truth, but neither could she tell a lie. Between these contending feelings, she at last resolved to throw herself on her father's mercy by confessing all to him.

"Papa, you will not be angry with me, will you, when I tell you that I do like Mr.

Morton?" said Margaret, her face suffused with blushes.

"Does this stranger return your devotion—has he given you proofs of his love, or are you feeding your fancy on your own imagination?" he replied, rather sarcastically.

"No, he has never said anything to me; I only speak of my own feelings, I cannot answer for his."

"Do you think that he would refuse a Countess in her own right, and give you the preference?"

"I do not know, but I hope that he would."

"A truce to this folly; I had looked for better things from one in whose veins my blood flows. You must renounce this silly idle passion for one who cares not for you, a man whom you will in all probability never see again. You must, I insist, renounce him and accept the splendid offer of the Baronet, who is all love and devotion to you, and will be a husband whom you will have every cause to be proud of. Tell me, Margaret," he con-

tinued, in a stern voice, "if you are willing to follow my wishes?"

"I cannot marry Sir Henry; I could never love him in the least. Do not, dearest papa, force me into this dreadful marriage," said Margaret, with tears in her eyes.

"I have given my word of honour to the Baronet, and I must keep it. You must be his bride."

"I beg of you, papa, not to doom me to such a fate, which will be worse than death. You will not, for my mother's sake!" cried Margaret, as she threw herself on her knees before him.

This speech agitated Mr. Wendell much more than he chose that his daughter should see, so turning from her, he said,

"We will not continue this subject any further at present, but I wish you to understand that I intend you to marry the future Earl of Merwyn. You may now go to your own room, and think over our conversation."

With this he turned to his labours; and Margaret, without another word, retired to

her chamber, there to yield herself anew to the growing sorrow which made life miserable.

We will now leave our friends, and hurry across the Channel to see how Mr. Morton has been getting on during our prolonged absence.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. MORTON AGAIN.

THE shades of night had fallen on Paris; it was some time since the day-god had sunk into his golden couch in the west, throwing his latest rays over church, palace, and high dome, gilding them with glittering beams of mellowed light, so that they shone resplendent in their borrowed brightness.

Our scene opens in a familiar and well-known room in the Place Vendôme. As the ormolu clock on the mantelpiece struck half-past eight, the occupant of the apartment rose, and, leaving some directions with his valet, left the house, and, after a walk of about twenty minutes, found himself in the Faubourg St. Germain, in front of a

mansion already familiar to us. As Mr. Morton—for he it is—is some ten minutes too early for his appointment, we will take this opportunity of entering the stately mansion, and see what is going on there. Passing through the grand old doorway into a large and elegant hall, which is composed entirely of oak in panelling and carving, we see straight before us a broad staircase, which we mount, and soon find our way into a splendid boudoir, fitted up in the most sumptuous manner. The walls of this room, which is the retreat of the fair Countess de la Tour, are hung with silk damask of Eugénie blue; the furniture is rosewood, covered with the same exquisite material. The carpet is also of colour to match, and is a rich Turkey velvet, which gives forth no sound as the foot falls upon it. There is a beautiful *amour à glace* reaching to the ceiling, with its long high door of thick plate-glass, which reflects unerringly from its polished surface the lovely mistress of the noble house. The chest of drawers is beau-

tifully carved. On the mantelpiece there is a high, broad mirror, and a superb clock, and two candelabras of the most exquisite workmanship in ormolu, and between the two windows which look into the street stands a pier-glass of the finest French plate. These windows are hung with silk damask, corresponding in delicate colour with the rich hangings, underneath which are lace ones of the finest texture. In this boudoir was collected everything that the generous use of money could purchase; but there was one thing which it did not contain—a thing more valuable than all else, and that was peace of mind, which neither position, beauty, nor wealth could secure for their owner. Alas! that we should say it, this room contained an aching heart!

Seated on, or rather reclining on a couch was the fair young mistress of all the gorgeous surroundings. She had been in this position for some time, conversing with her maid Nannette, who was standing beside her. And as the subject of the conversa-

tion is evidently of deep moment to the mistress, and extremely interesting to the maid, it will be as well to give that portion of it which had taken place previous to our entrance.

It was about eight o'clock when the Countess, who had been seated for about an hour in an easy-chair, looking pale and agitated, rose and rang for her maid. After accomplishing this, she threw herself on the couch to await the coming of her servant, and to meditate on the same subject which had filled her mind during the whole day. As she partially reclines on the blue silk covering, we are forced to admire her wonderful loveliness, and to feel in our breast compassion and pity for her sufferings. She is dressed in a white muslin demi-toilette, with rose-coloured trimmings, and pink coral ornaments. Sparkling on her fingers are gems of price; over the wedding-ring is a half-hoop diamond, and another of ruby of the most perfect colour, and on the little finger of the same hand is an oblong turquoise set in diamonds. On the other

hand flashes a most magnificent single diamond of the purest water—an heirloom in the family, and of great value.

We have admired but a tithe of the beauties of the boudoir and its mistress, when the door opens, and Nannette enters and approaches her mistress.

"Well, Nannette, everything is arranged, I hope?"

"Yes, my lady."

"I have a strange presentiment of evil, and a wish that it was all safely over."

"There is nothing to fear, my lady. M. le Comte is at his château too far away to do any harm."

"I know that, Nannette, but notwithstanding all that, I cannot throw off my feelings of apprehension—they press on me without cessation."

"It is only nervousness; my lady had better have a glass of wine—it will make her feel stronger."

"No, thanks, I could not drink it. Suppose the Count should by any chance come back, what would the consequences

be? I should be ruined. Oh! horrible thought, it constantly fills my mind with terror!"

"You need not be frightened; there is not the least danger."

"Ah! Nannette, if the Count had only continued the same as when we were first married, I might have loved him in time. But to be neglected, as he neglects me, for such society and such pursuits as now occupy his attention, fills my heart with a bitterness which no mere cruelty could have inspired it with."

"He is not very attentive to you, my lady, but then most of the gentlemen are the same; their wives are not so true as you are, and therefore do not mind it."

"Very true; but it must be dreadful to lose one's own respect. Even the step which I have already taken appears too fearful for me to contemplate."

"It will all be ended to-night, and to-morrow you will be able to banish from your mind the whole affair."

"No, no, Nannette, I can never be the

same as I was before I met this Englishman. It was an unhappy day for me, but now it cannot be helped."

"Madame will soon forget it."

"Nannette, has the Count ever made dishonourable advances to you since the time I caught him doing so? Wretch that he is, not to respect even my own personal attendant."

Had the Countess been narrowly watching the face of her maid, she would have seen a momentary flush of confusion pass over it. This was a direct question, and required a direct and ready lie, without a moment's hesitation. The requirements of the case were met with promptitude.

"No, Madame, Monsieur has never renewed his proposals; and had he, you know, my lady, that I would have rejected them, as I did before."

"You are a very good girl, and I shall not forget your services to me in this trying time."

The maid was really a good-natured person, who felt for her mistress in her

present sufferings and would have spared her the coming calamity, if it had been in her power to do so, and at the same time obtain the splendid bribe which the Count had offered her. But as the two things were not compatible, and as she stood in great terror of her seducer, she calmly took part in a plot for her kind mistress's destruction.

We will here give a slight description of Nannette, as the reader may wish to know more intimately the woman who is playing so prominent a part in the episode in Mr. Morton's life we are now narrating. A native of the sunny province of Provence, she bore on her face the warm colouring of the south, suffused by the roseate flush of health. Her eyes were of a lustrous black, deep, and full of cunning; and the rest of her features, although not regular, were *piquante*. Her mouth was full and luscious, and from her clear low forehead her black hair was drawn tightly back. Her figure was well-rounded, and her dress displayed the fully-matured bust in its per-

fection. She was a very attractive little woman, full of life and gaiety, and naturally drew on herself the attentions of her dissolute master, to whom she had yielded without much struggle.

When Nannette, glancing at the ormolu clock, saw that it only wanted seven minutes to the half-hour, at which time she was to let the Count and his attendants in at the back entrance, she said,

"I will go and see that no spying eyes are about when Monsieur Morton comes."

"Do so, by all means, but do not stay away very long."

"I will be back in ten minutes, my lady."

After leaving the boudoir, Nannette hurried along the corridor, sending in a different direction all the servants she met, and entered a passage on the left hand, through which she passed into the private apartments of the Count. She here paused for a moment, and locked the door behind her, but seeing the clock before her pointing to twenty-nine minutes past eight, she

opened a door, and rushed quickly down a narrow and dark staircase, with a candle in her hand. In another minute the key was placed in the lock, and the door swung back on its hinges. This door opened into a small vestibule, from which a small but heavily ironed one opened into the street. Pausing for a moment, she heard a whistle, and three muffled raps on the heavy wood; setting down her candle, she drew back the bolts and bars, and soon felt the cool air of night in her face. In less than two minutes three persons were inside the vestibule, no eye having seen them enter. The leader was the Count de la Tour, who said,

"Well, Nannette, how does it all go? Well, I hope—eh, my little one?" he continued, chucking her under the chin.

"Yes, my lord, it is as you wish it; my lady is awaiting the arrival of the Englishman in her boudoir, and he will soon be here. You must not keep me, as Madame told me to return at once."

"Well, conduct us to my room, and you may then leave us; but mind you

return the moment the stranger is with your mistress."

When they were all in the apartments of her lord, she left them to return to her lady.

As she entered, the Countess said,

"It seems an hour since you left—where have you been so long?"

"It was only fifteen minutes, Madame."

"Nannette, when he comes, you may retire, but do not leave the ante-chamber; and come to me should I call you—do you understand me?"

"Yes, Madame, perfectly."

"You may now go, and bring Monsieur as soon as he arrives."

With this, Nannette withdrew, leaving her mistress alone.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHAMBER OF DEATH.

A SUCCESSION of silvery sounds rang through room, hall and corridor, the softly-pealing notes of nine. As the last vibration loses itself in the silence which reigns absolute, the door opens, and Mr. Morton enters the spacious hall, and follows the richly liveried footman up the broad staircase, where Nannette awaits to conduct him to her mistress.

"This way, Monsieur," said the maid leading him along the magnificent corridor until they reached a blue door. "Monsieur will find Madame inside awaiting him."

"Thank you—and here is something for

your trouble," said Mr. Morton, placing a napoleon in her willing palm.

He gently opened the door, and was soon in the softly-lighted room, and saw before him the fair mistress of the mansion, who arose to receive the welcome yet dreaded visitor.

For a moment they stood gazing at each other in silence, for they knew that they had reached a crisis in their lives. On the one side of them was a keen sense of honour, and a crowd of good resolutions—and on the other, the sweet dangerous influence which they exercised over each other. The beat of a pulse too much—a word a little too tender, might, they well knew, plunge them into sin.

"You are looking pale—are you not well this evening? Do not remain standing, but be seated, I pray," said the Countess, after they had clasped hands, and murmured some half inarticulate greetings.

The Countess resumed her seat on the couch, and Mr. Morton, drawing a chair

close to her, replied to her questions by saying,

"You are giving yourself much pain on my account, I fear."

"No, not at all," she replied.

"You must pardon me for what occurred at my apartments on the day you did me the honour of calling. I was carried away by your beauty, and could not resist. You are not angry with me, are you?"

"I excuse you, if any excuse you need, for my actions more than gave you the right to do as you did. I was very foolish. You must think very strangely of me, after all that has occurred," exclaimed the Countess, with tears of regret in her eyes.

"No, no, Madame, you must not give way to this feeling. My esteem and respect are as great for you as ever. All of us do at some time or other commit indiscretions. I am as much, if not more to blame than you are."

"I was not happy before I saw you—

and now I am, oh! so much more miserable. Whichever way I turn, sorrow seems to be inevitably my lot."

"I hope that meeting me has not been the source of your present unhappiness."

"Oh, no, Monsieur, and yet it has been, for it was a light thrown on darkness; but now, alas! I must do without the ray of sunshine, and the darkness is deeper."

"But, Madame, surely we can still be friends, and in the depths of a pure, calm friendship drown all regrets?"

"Friends, yes, yes; we *must* be friends; but I fear this must be the last time we shall ever meet."

"It would no doubt be much better for us both. The course you have resolved on pursuing does credit to your judgment. Your husband must be fond of you—I cannot imagine anyone not being so. You are too young and beautiful for him to have tired of," said Mr. Morton.

"You little know the man to whom I

am wedded; he never loved me truly; his was only a passion awakened into life by the newness of the possession, and soon cooled when he became master of his desires."

"Pardon me, but he must be a wretch if he can be disregardful of your charms and rights. Does he never affect tenderness toward you?"

"Never; he has mistress after mistress, and lives for himself only. I began to grow fond of him at first, but his changed manners soon chilled my affections?"

"Does the Count often go to his chateau?"

"No, he seldom, if ever, leaves town, but generally sends me there alone," replied the Countess.

"Is there no danger of his returning suddenly?—might he not come back to-night?"

"He is certain not to do so, as his letter said that he would remain away some time. What do you fear, Monsieur?" exclaimed the Countess, rather alarmed.

"Nothing, I assure you, only something

seems constantly to whisper danger! danger! It is only my fancy, there can be nothing to apprehend."

"Do you intend remaining long in Paris, Monsieur?"

"No, I return to England some time during the latter part of the month. I have engagements which compel me to be there, or else I should spend the winter here," said Mr. Morton.

"You do not consider that I am unkind in making this one last interview?"

"Not at all, Madame."

"You know, Monsieur, as well as I do, the position in which I am placed. My honour compels me to take the step which I have just mentioned. I was at first unconscious of the danger and wrong into which I was running, but happily my eyes were opened to the consequences before it was too late to retreat. I am now strong in my determination of doing what seems right. It is no reason why I should err because my husband ignores his duties."

"Alas! what you say, Madame, is but too true. But let me, for one wild moment more, think what would have been the difference in our fate had we but met sooner! Virtue then would have blest our closest union, whereas now the shadow of sin falls upon us if we do but for an instant meet!"

Mr. Morton had no intention of breaking his good resolutions, but there could be no doubt that, as the moments flew by, they were becoming much softened by the intoxicating influence of the loveliness before him; and that even the graceful beauty of the Countess's costume, and of the apartment in which they sat, conspired to lull his heart into a dangerous state of melting pity. He had come to tell a wounded heart that he could only offer it friendship in lieu of love, and now as he gazed upon the exquisite tear-dew'd eyes which were resting so mournfully on his own, it almost seemed as though the word "friendship" were a cold and brutal one. He knew that it was imprudent—wrong—

but our friend could not refrain from endeavouring to lighten the load which his lovely companion had to bear; and she was happy in the thought that she was loved by somebody, and that one a man of honour, who respected her position instead of trying to work her ruin. What would she not have given at that moment to have been as free and light of heart as when she roved through the old park of her ancestors, before the dreaded incubus of her life had drawn her from its happy retreat!

The Countess mused on for a few moments in this manner, wreathing bright dreams of pleasure from the fruitful stores of the imagination, until she almost became again glad of spirit and light of heart, under the genial influence of the fairy vision of *what might have been.* Alas! this is a thought which runs through all our lives, making us either sigh at the lost pleasure that we might have possessed had we done otherwise, or tremble at the terrible consequences

which might have flowed from the actions we contemplated doing; and with what relief do we assure ourselves that the danger is now passed, but how we mourn for the happiness *which might have been!*

From the depths of her heart there arose to the surface bright bubbles, differently coloured, as the rays of imaginative desire tinged them with varied hues—some golden, some purple, and then some of purple and gold; but soon the tide ebbed back, and with it faded the fond illusions of the passing moment.

The Countess, however, soon ceased to dream, and she was speedily again in the midst of her sorrow, with the terrible thought of the present only yielding to the awful dread of the dreary future, which loomed up in the distance giant-like and full of terrors, without a gleam of hope to dispel the gathering clouds. For although she could not anticipate the impending storm which was soon to burst upon Mr. Morton and herself, she found suf-

ficient materials to fill her cup of sorrow in the present, in the anticipation of what was to be her coming life.

"It would have been better for us both to have met before, or never to have seen each other," replied the Countess.

"Have you not a father and mother still living to whom you can apply for some protection against the conduct of your husband? Surely they would not willingly see you treated in this manner by the Count," said Mr. Morton, who had now resumed the tone he had resolved to adopt throughout the interview.

"Yes, Monsieur, I have both father and mother, but I have never yet complained to them, from two motives: the first was the shame of confessing the actions of the man who was my husband; the second reason was, that it might only result in making him still more cruel and odious. My parents are very proud of the alliance, and would not like to displease the Count."

As the Countess said this, Mr. Morton

thought of Mr. Wendell, whose character he thoroughly guaged.

"Would that I could render you some assistance," he said; "but it is not in my power, and, besides, I have no right to interfere between man and wife."

At this moment the Countess glanced at the ormolu timepiece on the opposite mantel-piece, and saw with astonishment that it was now ten minutes past ten, and said,

"You will pardon me, Monsieur, but I fear you will have to go in a few minutes, as you might be seen going out, and there are many spying eyes in this house. When the half-hour strikes, we shall be compelled to part for ever, never again to meet."

"As you wish Madame; I would not willingly be the cause of bringing on you the least suspicion. But, may I ask, do you place entire trust and confidence in your maid?"

"I have never had the least cause for doubting her integrity. I believe that she is devoted to me. Nothing, I am certain,

could induce her to betray me; and, above all, she detests the Count; he has not been over-courteous to her—his conduct has been far different from that of a master and gentleman. That is one reason why I place so much confidence in her."

"Did you destroy the letters I sent you?" said Mr. Morton.

"No, I did not."

"They ought not to be kept."

"Nobody will ever see them."

"You cannot be certain of that."

"Then you think I ought to burn them?"

"Most assuredly I do."

"I will do it this very evening," said the Countess, with a sigh.

"They have been in a place of safety, have they not?" asked Mr. Morton.

"In my dressing-case, which no one can open but myself and Nannette."

"Somehow, Madame, I have but little confidence in her."

"Why, Monsieur? What have you seen about her to lead you to distrust her?"

"Nothing particular."

"Then why do you give yourself unnecessary alarm?" said the Countess.

"It arises from a casual study of her face, when she was at my apartments."

"The time she took my letter?"

"Yes, it was then," replied Mr. Morton.

"I hope that you are mistaken in your estimate of her character," the Countess said, growing somewhat alarmed.

"You must know her better than I do; but still I cannot help this strange feeling, it has haunted me now for some time, and I am not able to throw it off."

"Do you believe in presentiments, Monsieur?"

"No, I do not exactly; but I do think that sometimes many little circumstances which the mind does not take note of individually, produce, collectively, that impression which is called presentiment."

"You make me very nervous," said the Countess, extremely agitated; "really your words frighten me. Do you imagine that there is any danger to be apprehended?" she continued in a supplicating voice.

"No, no, it is only a foolish notion of mine; do not alarm yourself, I pray! All will go well, no doubt. I will tell you an incident bearing on the subject of presentiment if there is time," he said, glancing at the clock.

"Do," replied the Countess; "there are ten minutes left us, and five minutes one way or the other will make but little difference."

"I will relate the story to you as I heard it, and will vouch for the truth of it.—There was a friend of mine who had seen many of the ups and downs of this world, having been tossed on the tumultuous sea of life until he had drawn from it the bitter experience of its coldness. At the time I am about to speak of, he found himself in the western wilds of America, making one of a party of hunters. They had encamped some forty miles from any human habitation. Some days previous to this, my friend had been impressed with the presentiment of some impending danger, and that night the feeling of strange

foreboding became stronger than at any time before. He endeavoured in vain to throw off this silly fancy (for such he considered it to be), but, yielding at last to the conviction of its truth, he explained his fears to his companions, who only laughed at his vagaries. At his earnest entreaties they consented to sleep in such a manner that they might be ready for any unforeseen occurrence. My friend's comrades were soon asleep under arms; but he could not close his eyes; and happy was it that such was the case, for had it been otherwise, the morrow's sun, as it arose from the east, would have shed its golden rays on the dead.

"At twelve o'clock or thereabouts, the almost silent tread of the moccassin aroused him to a sense of impending danger. Gazing in the direction of the noise, he saw the dusky figures of the red men, who were stealing softly towards them, with no peaceful intentions. The gentleman of whom I speak gently aroused an old trapper next him, who had acted as a guide.

The old man of the forest saw at a glance the impending danger, and awoke his next neighbour; the three, acting in consort, discharged their rifles at the savages, and sprang to their feet with bowie-knives and revolvers. Their companions, roused by the tumult, joined in the fray, and the Indians were put to flight, leaving eight warriors dead on the field. This was the happy result of listening to the whisperings of an unseen protector."

"Your story fills me with dread—I wish that you had not told it."

"I am sorry that you should be frightened, Madame."

"It is nothing—it will pass in a moment. I will now get the letters, and burn them before you leave."

In accordance with this determination, she arose and proceeded to her dressing-case, which stood on a beautiful dressing-table of carved rosewood in the room adjoining, but returned in a few minutes pale and haggard, as if she had seen a ghost or goblin there.

"What is the matter?—what has caused you such a fright? You look pale and trembling."

"Oh! Monsieur, I am lost, ruined!—nothing can save me!" exclaimed the Countess, bursting into floods of tears.

"The letters, where are they?" asked Mr. Morton, in an anxious voice.

"Gone! gone!—they have been taken from where I placed them," almost shrieked the Countess.

Mr. Morton became rooted to where he stood—he could hardly believe his ears. Who had taken them, and what would be the consequences? hastily flashed through his brain; he already felt the breath of the coming storm, and was fearful what course to pursue.

During this silence we will take a hasty glance at the other persons who are soon to take a part in the events we have to relate. As soon as Nannette had seen Mr. Morton enter the boudoir, she ran back to where she had left the Count and his companions, and brought them to the door of

her mistress's room, where they stood awaiting the proper time to burst on the unconscious occupants. The Count could distinctly hear all the conversation, and lingered, hoping that the Englishman and his wife might compromise themselves in a serious manner. As time wore on, and he listened to their sayings, he heard with chagrin the determination of the Countess, and the acquiescence of Mr. Morton. The Comte de la Tour was on the point of entering the room, when our friend began the relation of the story of presentiment, and delayed until it was finished. He was busily engaged in a whispered conversation with Nannette, when the bell rang for her.

We will now return to the boudoir, and listen to the speech which is about to fall from the lips of Mr. Morton.

"Who can have taken them from the dressing-case? It must be the work of your maid."

"What could she want with them?"

"We cannot tell what she might do."

"They could not be of any benefit to her, surely," replied the Countess.

"That remains to be seen, Madame."

"Tell me, I pray, what do you think can have induced her to take them?"

"To give them to your husband, the Comte de la Tour, who, no doubt, has them in his possession at this very moment."

"No, no, you cannot mean that! If so, I am ruined beyond all hope!"

"I may be mistaken; but who else would care for them? You should have burned my letters the moment you had read their contents."

"I was very foolish! Alas! I knew no better. You are not angry with me, are you?" she replied, looking imploringly at him through her tears.

"No, not at all; but I am sorry that you did not do it."

"I will ring at once for Nannette, and inquire of her where they are. She will not dare to deny what she may know about them."

With this the Countess rang the bell, and awaited anxiously the coming of her maid. During the interval not a word was exchanged between the two; they stood mute and dumbfoundered, fearing the arrival of the one they were expecting. They looked at one another with inquiring glances, not daring to trust their tongues, until some more light should have been shed on this dark and mysterious affair.

The door at length opened, and instead of the maid they saw the Count and his companions. The Countess gave one terrible shriek, and fell almost lifeless on the floor; the unexpected and awful event had been too great for her already overstrung nerves: she had yielded to its force, and now lay prostrate before her husband.

Mr. Morton saw at once the condition of affairs, and knew that there was no avenue of escape, so determined to defend himself to the last. He had no weapons of defence, and would have to depend entirely on his own personal strength and prowess, which were very great; but what could he hope

from a combat with three opponents, and those probably armed? The case was desperate, and needed desperate measures. Acting on this, he prepared himself for the worst.

"Monsieur, why do I find you here in the boudoir of Madame the Countess de la Tour? Will you be kind enough to explain your presence?" said the Count, with mock politeness.

"First tell me by what right you question me!" replied Mr. Morton haughtily.

"Pardon me, Monsieur, if I have been rude. My right is, that this is my house, and Madame happens to be my wife."

"I will explain all and give you all the satisfaction you desire; but I pray that you will call Madame's maid, that she may remove her mistress, and apply restoratives."

"Nannette!" cried the Count.

"Yes, Monsieur," she replied, entering the room.

"Remove your mistress to her dressing-room, and do what you can for her."

This was soon done, and the Count, his

companions, and Mr. Morton were left alone.

"You are in my power, Monsieur! Will you yield quietly, or shall we have to use force?"

"I shall only submit when I am compelled to do so. Attack me at your peril. I warn you that I shall not prove an easy conquest."

"As you please," replied the Count. "Now, my good fellows," he continued, addressing the ruffians who stood by, like bloodhounds waiting with eagerness to be loosed on the victim. "Seize him!" he cried, and in a moment they bounded to the assault.

They had mistaken their man, and in an instant they both fell, one after the other, before him. The villains were stunned for the instant, but sprang again to their feet, and then advanced more cautiously upon the unpleasant English fist, for which they had acquired no liking. As the first assailant fell, a short club (the same as the life-preservers carried by English burglars)

dropped from his belt. The quick eye of our friend saw the weapon, and he at once seized it before the owner could recover himself. The Count and his party were frustrated by this unlooked-for resistance to their superior numbers, and then again proceeded to the contest. The Count did not participate, but looked on to see how the fight would turn. It was not from cowardice that he did not enter the lists, but from prudence.

"I say, Jean," said one of the Frenchmen, "this English fellow has a heavy hand. I never before felt so hard a blow."

"That he has, Victor; we must be cautious, or else our heads will come in contact with my club."

"You were foolish to have it hanging so loosely. Had you taken my advice it would never have found its way into his hand."

"Why does my lord stand by without lending us some help?" said Victor.

"He will do his work when the time

comes. I should like to see the colour of this Englishman's blood. Ha! ha! ha!" replied Jean.

"Ha! ha! ha!" responded Victor.

There was an awful meaning in the almost sardonic laughter.

At this moment Mr. Morton sprang forward with the quickness and agility of a tiger. His coming was so sudden, that before the wretches had time to strike a blow, one of them was sent to the ground with a sullen crash; his skull must have been broken, so strong was the blow. Jean, who saw his comrade fall, rushed on our friend, and struck him on the shoulder, and then closed.

They were both men of great muscular power, but the struggle was not of long duration, for Mr. Morton soon gained the upper hand of Jean, and threw him on the floor, and was about to turn when he received a blow from a heavy cane on the back of the head, and fell prostrate by the side of his vanquished foe, who sprang to his feet, and would have finished

the work which his patron had begun, had not the Count withheld him with strength and words.

"You must not touch him; if he should die the consequences might be unpleasant. We had better look to your comrade. Victor is his name, is it not?"

"Yes, Monsieur," replied the man sullenly. Like the tiger who has tasted blood, he longed for more.

They at once proceeded to where Victor lay, and kneeling by his side they raised his head, from which the crimson tide poured forth in torrents, reddening the blue carpet on which he lay. Jean gazed long and earnestly on the death-like face, and placed his cheek against the pale lips; not a breath could he feel—all was quiet. Then tearing open the waistcoat, he laid his ear on the heart; not a sound could he hear, not a pulsation vibrated in the bosom of the man who a little hour ago had been full of life and daring energy. He listened in vain for the beating heart—all was still: his friend was dead, his eyes were glazed

with the awful chill of departed life. No more for him would the rising sun bring joy; no more would the darkness of the night throw around him the cloak of obscurity to screen him from the keen eye of justice, which had long watched his movements, trying in vain to fix on him the brand of his numerous crimes. With Victor all was passed in this world; nothing that friend or foe could do would to him again bring happiness or woe. He had left this world, with all his crimes full-grown, and thick as the hairs that covered his head. He had not listened in his last moments to the soothing voice of the man of God; he had not felt the gentle influence of religion stealing softly and soothingly on the slow death-bed. No, he had been cut off in the very midst of a crime, at the very time when he was endeavouring to injure his fellow-creature.

The companion gazed on the face and form of his lifeless friend, and down the rugged cheek fell a tear, sad tribute to the fallen man. As Victor lay outstretched

on the floor he was a fine study for the painter. He was somewhat shorter than his comrade, and more thickly set; the great breadth of chest and massive shoulders displayed the strength of his physical nature. His upturned face was strongly marked with the deeply furrowing lines of passion and ungoverned will. Over the forehead, which was low but broad, the shaggy black hair fell in masses until it almost touched the dark eyebrows beneath. The full black eyes in life had shone with irrepressible fierceness, but now were glazed, cold and senseless; the nose was of the Roman type, and the short upper lip was covered with a dark brown moustache, which shaded the closely compressed mouth, that expressed even in death firmness of purpose. Underneath, the square Roman chin was partly hidden by an imperial.

"Come, come!" cried the Count, who feared that the tenderness which his remaining ruffian was displaying over the corpse of his friend might be the prelude to a re-

fusal to complete the matter in hand, "you must not waste the time, it is more precious than gold. You shall have your friend's share of the money."

"I would rather that he had lived; I shall not soon again find another like him," replied Jean sadly.

"The Englishman is moving; he must be carried to the place you have provided before he regains his senses, or else we may find him troublesome."

"Would that your blow had been fatal," growled the man.

"That would not have suited my purpose."

"Why do you care for his life?"

"I do not care for it; but before he is taken from here you must solemnly swear that you will not harm him, nor do anything without first consulting me. Do you hear?" the Count continued, as the man remained sullenly silent.

"Yes, Monsieur, I do; your commands shall be obeyed, although it gives me a pang to promise."

"That is a good fellow. Have you the cords and gag with you?"

"Here they are," said Jean, producing from his pocket the required articles.

"Even as he is, it would never do to let him go untied and ungagged. He is a bad opponent; you felt his power, eh, Jean?"

"I did," he replied, as he passed his hand over the swollen eye.

They then proceeded to tie the hands of Mr. Morton, and place in his mouth the gag. When this was accomplished the Count went into the corridor and made sure that all the servants were out of sight; then, returning, he raised our friend, with the assistance of Jean, and carried him from the room. They soon entered the passage which led to the private door, and slowly staggering down the stairs, placed their heavy burden in the vestibule, and then returned to fetch the dead man. This was soon accomplished, and in a few minutes the outside door opened to admit another man, who had been waiting for the

last hour. This was the remaining one of the three whom we saw the Count with, when he was bargaining for their services for the work of this bloody night.

"What is this, my lord?" he said, the moment his eye rested on the inanimate form of Victor, and glanced from one to the other for an answer.

"He is dead, Pierre—killed by that Englishman," replied Jean, without waiting for the Count to speak.

"Sacre Dieu!" exclaimed the new-comer, "how was that done?"

"He knocked us both down with his fists, and caught Victor's club, with which he struck him so hard across the head as to kill him."

"Why is this stranger bound?" asked the one who appeared to be the chief. "Why was he not sent to keep our poor companion company?"

"Because I did not wish it; he must not be harmed. It was no fault of his that your friend's skull was so thin!" replied the Count, fiercely.

The man recognized the spirit made to rule, and bowed his head. The Count was too good a master to offend. The insult to the dead was passed by, but was not forgotten; it slept, to awake at another and more propitious time.

"I will now leave you for a few minutes, and while I am gone one of you had better have the carriage brought round to convey this man away."

"What are we to do with the dead man?" said Pierre, grimly. "It is not pleasant to drive through the streets of Paris in company with a lifeless body."

"What do you fear?" asked the Count.

"The gendarmes might wish to chat with us, and discover the cargo we carried; that would bring our necks into an unpleasant condition."

"You are becoming nervous."

"I nervous!" replied Pierre, with a low laugh.

"This cannot be the first time that you have seen blood—by your conduct one would think that it was," said the Count,

who then ascended the stairs, and left them alone.

It was indeed a ghastly sight to see those two men standing in this small vestibule, with a corpse on one side, and a wounded man on the other, the pale flickering light of the candle lending an unnatural aspect to the scene. For a moment after the master had left, the men stood looking at each other in silence. At length this fearful quiet was broken by Pierre, who said,

"Well, Jean, this is a bad night's work, and may lead to unlooked-for consequences."

"The best thing to do is to have the carriage at once, and settle what is to be done when we are safely at home, out of the reach of the spying gendarmes."

"Very true; it is good advice, and I will go for the carriage, while you remain here."

With this the candle was closed up in the dark lantern, and Pierre went forth into the street, and, after about ten

minutes, found the vehicle he was in search of.

"Good evening, my jolly boy; how do you feel as a coachman?" said Pierre.

"All right, and ready for the work."

"It is heavier than we bargained for."

"How is that?" said the coachman.

"Victor is dead, and the Englishman nearly so."

"Would that he was, if he slew the good Victor, the jolliest dog in all the band."

"That he was; I would not have had him killed for all the money we are to receive," said Pierre.

"The Count ought to pay us well for the loss of so good a man."

"I was thinking of that, and will see that we are not cheated."

"That you will," replied his companion.

"I will get in, we have no time to lose. You know where to drive."

With this the worthies began driving slowly along so as not to attract the attention of any of the passing gendarmes

they might meet, and in a few moments they entered a little court-yard and drew up before the entrance from which Pierre had only a short time since come out. They gave three muffled raps, and the massive door of oak and iron swung heavily back on its ponderous hinges.

"Is everything ready?" said Pierre.

"Everything," replied the Count; "we had better place the dead one in first," he continued.

The work was not long in being completed, and our friend, the dead villain, and his companions were ready to start; but before going the Count placed in their hands the promised reward, or at least that half which was now due. The wretches clutched the bags which contained the ill-gotten gold with all the fervour with which the amorous swain clasps the hand of his loved mistress.

"And here is another five hundred francs for the death of your comrade. You will find me a liberal master if you prove yourselves faithful and obedient.

You have heard what I wish to be done with your prisoner—not a hair of his head must be harmed."

"Your orders shall be executed. We are very grateful to your lordship for the money, and hope that we shall be able to please you in everything we do," replied Pierre, who always acted as the spokesman.

Without saying another word, they left the house, entered the carriage, and drove from the court-yard, the gates of which were closed by the Count himself.

We will not at present follow the retreating vehicle, but again ascend the dark narrow staircase, walking slowly behind the master of the hotel.

He had, after the departure of the living and the dead, closed the heavy door, bolting, barring, and chaining it, as it had been before, and then shut the one that led to the stairs. Then, proceeding to his own rooms, he paused for a moment to mature his already well-studied plans. We will follow the train of his thoughts,

and endeavour to discover his intentions. His musings were something after this fashion:

"This affair has assumed greater proportions than I had anticipated it would. The fellow's life is worthless, but then the law might look with different eyes on the subject. I wish there had been no blood spilt in the house. What if they should be stopped by the gendarmes!"

Dreadful thought! but the Count was not to be terrified by shadows, realities themselves being scarcely able to affect him. After running over in his mind for some minutes the scenes of the night, he then thought of his wife, and a dark smile of savage joy overspread his countenance, giving it a demoniac look. Having finished his ponderings, he proceeded towards the room which had been witness to the extraordinary occurrences of the evening.

CHAPTER X.

THE FAITHLESS MAID.

IN a dressing-room of ample size, and fitted up *en suite* with the boudoir, lay the Countess on the couch where she had been placed by Nannette, who had brought her from the scene of strife after the fainting fit in which she had fallen senseless on the floor. Her dress had been unloosed, water sprinkled on her face, and all the restoratives which could be procured were used, until at last, after Nannette had almost despaired of ever seeing her mistress's eyes open, she revived, and gazed with a look of terror and reproach on the faithless maid, who had assumed an expression of innocence and deep sympathy for the fair sufferer on whose head she had brought such awful misery.

"The letters, Nannette!—the letters! Where are they?—what have you done with them?—why did you take them from the dressing-case?"

"What letters does Madame mean? I have taken none."

"The letters of the stranger," replied the Countess, with a slight blush stealing through the pallor of her cheek.

"They must be there, Madame; I have never seen them since the day I gave the last one to you. Surely you must be mistaken."

"No, no, Nannette, they are gone, and you are the only one who has access to the case. You have given them to the Count."

"I swear to you that I never did. I am as innocent as yourself of the deed. You are very cruel thus to mistrust me."

"Then how could they have disappeared? Surely not without hands?"

"The Count must have obtained them in some way; he may have a key, and

have entered your room while you were absent."

"But how could he be in the house without his presence being known."

"You forget, Madame, that there is a staircase leading from Monsieur's apartments to the private entrance, of which he alone has the key."

"True, very true—I did not think of that."

The Countess did not give full credence to the story of her maid, but could not disprove it; so, determined to let the matter rest at present, and keep a sharp look-out on the future conduct of the suspicious Nannette, she resolved—the more thoroughly to carry her purpose into effect—to give her to understand that confidence was again restored.

The false maid and confidante saw with pleasure that her deceived mistress was unaware of her perfidy. She had played her part with great skill, and rejoiced at the result of her deceit.

Very soon the noise of the fierce con-

test in the next room burst on them in all its force, and made them both shudder.

"They are killing him," murmured the Countess, as she raised herself from the couch; "they will murder the Englishman."

"No, I do not think they will," replied Nannette, almost as pale as her mistress.

The din grew louder as Mr. Morton sprang forward and dashed to the floor one of his assailants, and closed with the other in the terrible embrace of deadly struggle from which they were parted by the opportune blow of the Count.

The excited lady would have rushed into the room and flung herself amidst the combatants, had not Nannette withheld her from the desperate purpose, which would only have added fuel to the flame, and been the cause of enraging her husband to an extent that the blood of his victim alone could have appeased. In this frantic state did the lovely and agitated

woman await the issue of this unseen combat. When all the sounds had died away, and only the memory of the retreating footsteps in the corridor lingered in her mind, she entered the boudoir, where that same evening she had received the stranger, and where all was then peace and quietness.

How changed was the scene! Deadly and awful silence reigned throughout the apartment—that strange stillness, which tells of the recent presence of death. The chairs were overturned, a table had been upset by the fall of Victor, and the books and ornaments which were upon its polished surface lay scattered and broken, strewed about the floor in wild confusion. Over all this the Countess threw a terrified glance, frightened at the evidences of the strife; but at length her eye was caught and arrested by the blood-red pool which lay on the carpet, and then came into her eyes that supreme look of horror and fear which can never visit a human countenance, for however

brief a moment, without leaving its traces there for life. She believed this to be the life-tide of Mr. Morton, and thought he was dead. She could see the pale face of the lifeless one upturned to her, in suppliance and reproach. The light faded from before her, and giddy darkness filled the room. She had again fainted, and this time lingered for a long half-hour in a state of unconsciousness. When she awoke from the stupor, she saw her husband leaving the room, and heard him saying to Nannette that he would not return that evening.

The Count, on coming back from the execution of his work, heard from Nannette the condition of her mistress, and how she had fainted the second time; he therefore resolved to remain away at present, and forego his wished-for revenge until the morrow. He then told Nannette she must arrange the room so that the servants might not see the traces of the carnage of the night, and that she must place a rug or something over the

bloody carpet until it could be removed, and another put in its place. The maid promised to obey, and when she had sat by the bedside of her mistress until tired nature had sunk into a troubled repose, she did the bidding of the Count, so that when the morning's sun sent its bright beams through the half-closed blinds, no one would have thought, by the appearance of the apartment, that there had been so fierce a struggle in it the night before.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CURRENT OF FEELING.

THE Countess de la Tour remained in bed the next morning, as the excitement of the night before had left her weak and exhausted. She had been awake about an hour, and had partaken of some toast and tea, which somewhat revived her, when she turned to Nannette, and asked if the Count intended coming to her, or if he had gone out.

"I believe he has not yet risen—at least, so François, his valet, said some half an hour ago," replied the maid.

"You need not remain any longer at present, but return in about an hour."

The maid, in accordance with her mistress's wish, left the room, and the

Countess then fell into a deep fit of musing. The events of the past fortnight flashed across her heated brain in tumultuous course at first; but she soon gained the control of her emotions, and made the torrent of her thoughts flow in a milder stream. As she glanced calmly back, and saw plainly the first false step that she had taken, she involuntarily shuddered, and wished that the past might be obliterated from the tablets of her memory; but this could never be—they were impressed there as lastingly as the indelible stamp which the burning brand places on the quivering flesh of the culprit. She now murmured her thanks to an Almighty God that he had given her the strength to walk in the shining path of virtue, from which she had looked away for a moment into the seducing stream of pleasure, which had laved her feet with its voluptuous tide, and then shrank from the modesty of her gaze. She could not conceal from herself that she loved the stranger, but

she was strengthened by the knowledge that she had withstood all the temptations to which that love had exposed her.

The momentary ray of light which had burst on her darkness, had not only faded before the stern demands of duty, but had been succeeded by a dark cloud, which she could never hope to see dispersed. Before this unhappy event, she had been the subject of her husband's unkindness without a cause, and now she feared that he would seize upon what had just occurred as a just pretext for making her life unbearable. She was accustomed to his fiery bursts of temper, and knew that the interview which the Count intended having with her would be one that would have a terrible effect upon her future.

"Why was I forced to marry this man against my will?—one whom I could never love, his nature and mine being so antagonistic to each other? It was cruel of my parents to force me into this union, where every vow spoken at the

altar was false. Did they but know the misery of their beloved and only daughter, they would bitterly regret that they had ever let their pride master their love for me. Alas! alas! would that the sun of that day had never risen upon me as his bride, but had thrown its last level rays across my tomb. The cold dark grave would have been better, far, than the nuptial couch. But vain now are these thoughts, they but make the present darker and more dreary! I must nerve myself to meet the present, and leave the past to itself, trusting that the future may even yet have some mercy in store for me. I fear that Nannette has been the cause of my husband's discovering all this; for how could he have known had she not told him? I was very foolish to trust to her; but even now her straightforward denial of the matter makes me dislike to doubt what she says. How could the Count have obtained those letters. Surely he could not have known of their existence but for Nannette;

she must have betrayed me! The more I think of the matter the more convinced I become that she has proved false to the trust I reposed in her. I should have been more careful, I should never have done anything that could have given any one the power of playing the traitor!"

Unfortunate lady! We deeply sympathise with you, and can find much to palliate your conduct. The first step in the wrong direction was made in a moment of thoughtlessness, when the young love made the head dizzy, turning out prudence from its seat that passion might reign; but we must not forget, in extenuation of the offence, that reason soon asserted her rights, and sat triumphant upon her throne; not giving passion time to play thee any pranks that might have been fatal to thine honour, and death to thy self-respect.

Many, ah! many a woman has ere now stood on the fatal brink of ruin, with everything holding her back—honour, self-re-

spect, happiness and religion! And all, alas! have been too feeble to save her. The slender threads have burst asunder at the repeated calls and allurements of a heated fancy and unhallowed passion, and she made the awful plunge into the sea of sin, which on its surface bore all the evidences of pleasure. She has floated for a time along the ebbing tide, laved on every side by all the soft blandishments of the deceitful sea, until growing heavy with the waters which have saturated her whole system, she sinks beneath the wave, and is soon drawn into some whirlpool by the under-current, and goes deeper and deeper, until she tastes the dregs that lie at the bottom! Then, too late, too late! she repents. Her death-knell has rung in every ear that loved to hear her name, and listen to her voice. Husband, children, parents and friends have left her in the darkness of despair. She is laid in the tomb of shame. The pleasant voice of her husband never again shall fall on her ear, the merry laugh

and happy prattle of her little flock shall never more gladden her heart; no, everything is lost, the present, the past, and even the future, unless repentance and deep earnest contrition overtake her before it is too late. The one to whom she has given all that woman can give in her moments of fondest love, has also forsaken her; he has sipped the sweetness and breathed the perfume of the flower, and left it to wither and die in the chill blasts of sin and shame.

Oh! man, where is thy blush?—where has pity fled that thou canst deliberately, and in cold blood, endeavour day by day to sap the foundation of all that thou shouldest revere and protect?

The Countess had seen beneath the luring billow the troubled tides of woe, and retraced her footsteps ere it was too late. We do not doubt but that many will say that the Countess was bold, unwomanly, shameless, and unworthy the sympathy we have bestowed on her; and to those ladies (we are sure that such

objectors will be women) we will reply, that she has not lost one atom of our respect, but, in fact, has increased it by her noble resistance to the dictates of passion. And whilst we cannot but regard her love for Mr. Morton as a great misfortune, we do not consider that it was a crime, for that love was merely the natural result of a warm heart and tender disposition. Had she allowed this feeling to lead her from the path of virtue, then would it have assumed the proportions of a monstrous outrage against the honour of her sex, and a blasting crime to her family.

All people who are born with natural hearts and feelings, and more especially women, are endued with an inborn desire to love some object. In youth this affection is bestowed on dolls, dogs, and cats, and oftentimes the young girl has a *penchant* for some playfellow of the boy species. As they grow to the estate of womanhood, this heirloom, which has descended from Adam and Eve, bursts

into the fulness of perfection; the heart looks about to choose some other to beat in unison with it, and is not content until it is found. We hold to this belief, that every woman and man must at some time of their lives meet with some one whom they cannot help loving, whether that love be or be not reciprocated. In the latter case, some hearts being more elastic than others, recover the shock; but others become seared and blighted.

Now we will take, for an example to illustrate our theory, the Countess, or any other woman who may have been forced to marry without loving the man she wedded (as in France is generally the case). The Countess being before us, we will make use of her as our instance. She had never known what it was to love anyone previous to her marriage, and would have moulded her heart to her husband had he been worthy of it; but his conduct had been such as to repel rather than to gain the affection of his wife, who, being under the influ-

ence of the natural law we have alluded to, needed some one to love. Her virtue and duty to the Count had ever prevented her from encouraging any of the pretensions of the numerous gallants of Paris who were sensible of her charms; but on a day fatal to her peace of mind, she had seen our friend, Mr. Morton, and felt the necessity of her nature spring into existence; and without stopping to count the cost, she indulged for the moment in a pleasurable dream, from which she awoke in time to prevent her giddy thoughtlessness from bringing on her ruin and disgrace. It is true, that even when her better sense had come to her aid, she continued to love the Englishman with all the depth and devotion of a fond woman; but she had determined to let this passion feed on the heart which gave it birth, rather than commit any transgression against the duties of a wife and mother.

The Countess still continued to muse

on the events of the day as she lay in her bed, more lovely than ever, her dark hair lying on the snow-white pillow in wavy masses, her large brown dreamy eyes full of softness and beauty, her lovely throat swan-like and fair,—all which made her appear like a vision of fairy-land rather than a being of earth.

The door gently opens, and Nannette enters.

"How is Madame now? I hope she is better," said the maid.

"Much better," replied the Countess.

"Will you have another cup of tea?"

"No, thanks."

"If Madame is well enough, Monsieur the Count would like to see her for a few moments."

"Yes, I might as well see the end of it now as wait," she replied, with a heavy sigh.

"Will you receive him as you are, or rise?"

"I think I will get up and lie on the couch after I am dressed."

Nannette withdrew to inform the Count of her mistress' desire, and then returned to assist the Countess in dressing.

We must now retire, and leave the Countess with the graces.

CHAPTER XII.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

WE will now follow the Count as he enters his wife's apartment. He had been up for a long time, and had been musing over the past, and endeavouring to determine what would be the best course to pursue. From the conversation which had taken place between his wife and Mr. Morton, he had seen that nothing had occurred to warrant him in suspecting the virtue of his spouse. Bad and reckless a man as he was, he had often thought that his conduct toward the Countess was not quite what it ought to be, and had at times resolved to act differently; but his passions had the com-

plete mastery of him, and he again became the creature of his fancy, forgetful of his good resolutions, which faded before the breath of pleasure.

Nannette enters and tells him that her mistress is now ready and waiting for his coming.

"I will follow you. That was rather a serious business last night," he said, anxious to see whether the remorse which had touched him had affected the maid.

"Yes, it was. You will not be very hard on Madame, will you? She is suffering very much now," replied the maid, with a shade of coolness in her voice; for no woman, even if she be cruel herself, likes a cruel man.

"My dear Nannette, you forget to whom you are speaking, thus to advise me with regard to Madame the Countess," he said rather severely.

"Pardon me, my lord, I meant no harm. You know as well as I do that she is as honest and true to you as anyone could wish, much more than you

deserve. If I were your wife, and you did as you do, I should not refuse the love of a handsome fellow," answered Nannette, somewhat petulantly.

"The devil! why the maid has also taken a fancy to this Englishman! Here is a fine state of things; but never mind, you little rogue, I will not be cruel to your mistress, for your sake."

"Madame, I am certain, suspects me of having given you the letters and betrayed her secret."

"Does she? That's unkind. How do you know that she does?"

"From what she said."

"Of course you denied it?"

"Of course I did."

"Did that satisfy her?"

"Hardly."

"That is unpleasant."

"Very, for me."

"Come, tell me what she said?"

"Nothing more than to indicate her disbelief in your having been able to take the letters without my assistance."

"How stupid of us not to have replaced them."

"They would then have been burned."

"True, true, it is better as it is."

"You must make Madame think that I knew nothing about it, will you?"

Nannette, you see, although she had fallen, craved for the respect of a virtuous woman.

In a moment more they reached the room of Madame, and the Count entered. His wife was reclining on a couch of blue silk, with a morning wrapper of white muslin, her hair done in curls behind, and tightly drawn off from her forehead. The Count had never seen her look so beautiful, and a slight recurrence of the feeling which had inspired him in other days came over him, to be stifled in a moment.

"Good morning, Madame; I trust that you are better," he said, in a tone of much courtesy.

"Yes, thanks, I am much better," replied the Countess nervously, not lifting her eyes from the carpet.

"I fear that the events of last night were too exciting for your delicate nerves."

"Would that I had died before they occurred!"

"Your honour and mine would then have been preserved. I had expected better things from you, the model of virtue and pattern of excellence. You should have taken to yourself some of the advice you often said was thrown away on me."

"My honour is safe, and yours, as far as I am concerned, has been protected. You have never suffered through me."

"You were willing to sacrifice it to the Englishman. Which of you was it that proved too virtuous? Did the stranger refuse to be seduced?" said the Count with a bitter sneer.

"Do not be so cruel, I pray. Listen to me and I will tell you all!" sobbed his wife.

"Go on; I will listen. It must be an interesting story."

The Countess then related all that the Count had heard from Nannette. Everything tallied with that which he had learned before. When she had finished, he said,

"It is a very charming love-tale, but too good to be true. I shall hold you guilty unless you can prove yourself otherwise."

The Countess saw that it would be impossible for her to do so, and that everything looked very much against her, so she determined not to try. She knew too well the stubborn heart of her husband to think of softening it by any persuasion that she could use.

"Have you anything more to say in excuse of your conduct?"

"Nothing; I have told you all, and can only add that I regret the step I took. I was giddy and foolish, and acted without thinking. You know very well that you have not done much to make me happy; you have neglected me from the time that we had been six months mar-

ried. Oh! Louis, had you continued as you were during the short-lived happiness of the first few months, I would have loved you with all the ardour of my nature. You forget that my life has been one of suffering from your unkindness; had you acted differently there never would have been anything for you to reproach me with, but now, alas! I reproach myself. Louis! Louis! why will you not be as you once were? Forgive me this time, and you shall never again have cause to suspect me!"

The Count listened to this outburst on the part of his wife with perfect indifference, and said,

"Madame, one would imagine from your conversation that I was the guilty one, and not you. I did not come to receive your accusations, but to ask you why you have been guilty of such extraordinary conduct, forgetting, as you have done, all your marriage vows, losing sight of your honour, breaking through every barrier which your position and duty placed be-

fore you; trampling under foot everything that you should have held as most sacred, and allowing your passions to control your reason, and thrown off all restraint. The ties of wife and mother were like threads, and burst asunder at the first strain; they must indeed have been very slender. My honour has been as naught; your own merely a shadow, which only required the first breath of desire to dispel it. Even with all these things dead in your heart, I should have thought that your being the Countess de la Tour would have withheld you from so unprovoked an outrage on the laws of society and good behaviour. But no, not even the fact of your bearing as you do one of the oldest names in France had any power to control your mad passions. Did you never ponder over the disgrace that was likely to ensue from such an act? Why did you not pause before taking the leap into the dark? But for that matter how am I to know that you are not used to such proceedings? No doubt whilst I have been

resting secure in the belief of your virtue, there was none to guard, it having been lost to some other favourite. Madame! Madame! I had hoped better things from one who bore the name of De la Tour! Have you never felt the shame of your unhallowed actions?"

During this long speech the Count had preserved the utmost composure of manner; in fact, he weighed each word before letting it fall on the ear of his wife. It was a speech more for effect than anything else. He knew that his wife was innocent, and that she had never committed any fault, except in the case of this foolish affair with the Englishman, which, had he not interfered, would have ended in the quietest manner possible, and without giving him any very serious cause of offence. At the same time, we own that had he never given the Countess the least cause of grievance, her conduct would have been inexcusable, and unworthy of our sympathy.

Every word which the Count uttered sank deep into the heart of his pale and agitated wife; she knew them to be untruths, and knew that he knew them to be such; but still she felt herself justly punished for ever having for a moment looked away from the path of right.

"You are well aware that never before this have I given you cause to doubt my fidelity and honour, and you must also know, from what you have seen and heard, that I am guiltless of any crime. I own that I have been foolish—that I have heedlessly rushed into danger—but I maintain that I retreated before any harm reached me. This I will swear on the cross, and call on the Holy Virgin to witness the truth of the statement. Do not doubt me, I pray. I cannot bear you to think me all that you say—it is too horrible!" exclaimed the Countess, bursting into a flood of tears, and covering her face with a pocket-handkerchief to conceal the sorrow which filled her eyes; but the heaving

of her bosom showed too plainly the intensity of her grief.

The Count was somewhat affected by the tears of his suffering wife, but his fiendish nature bade him go on in his course.

"Your story is very plausible, but the stranger shall give his version of the affair, and I shall then see if they coincide the one with the other."

"Where is he?" asked the Countess, with a tremulous voice.

"Ha! ha!—so you are interested in this man? He is where he will not give me any more trouble."

"Not dead?—you have not killed him, have you?"

"No, he is not dead, but badly wounded; he left some of his blood on the carpet in the boudoir. I must say that he is of good metal, and had I not struck him down, he would have mastered us all; he killed one of the men with the man's own club."

"Will he get well?"

"Why should you care?" said the Count, fiercely. "Better that he should die."

"I am sorry that he should lose his life through me."

"Would you have cared if I had been struck down by the ruffian? I think not. There would then have been no one to put a check on your inclinations."

"You are really unkind to imagine that I would have wished for your death; but it would not be strange if I were careless about it, for what with your mistresses and your abandoned friends, I never see you except to be insulted and ill-treated."

"Madame, I will have no more of this. You must prepare yourself to depart in a few days for my château, where you will remain until I choose to forgive your conduct."

"Monsieur, you forget that I am not a slave. My parents shall know all, and they will be best able to judge of my actions. I do not say that they will consider that I did right, but I do know

that they will never suffer their daughter to be used in the way which you intend."

"So you brave my authority, do you, and refuse to obey?"

"My father will be in town to-morrow, and unless you do differently, I shall speak to him. Report does not hold you very high; what I have done, is as light as a feather when compared with your deeds."

"Then, Madame, from this I am to understand that you intend making complaints to your father," replied the Count, his voice shaking with anger.

"I shall most certainly, if you act as you say you will."

The Count was somewhat disconcerted by this unwonted show of resolution on the part of his wife; and, after a moment's thought, he determined to change his line of policy.

"You mistake me," he said, in an altered tone; "I do not intend doing anything which will be unpleasant to you.

I thought that you might like to go away for some time, and be by yourself."

"Not to that place. I should like very much to go to the Château de la Tour."

"Well, you shall go there; I may have said more than I ought to, but you cannot deny that I have some reason to be angry, and that your conduct has been very suspicious."

"Reason to be angry, sir? Do you know that I am aware you have succeeded in your designs on Nannette?"

"What makes you think so?"

"Because she would never have told you about this affair otherwise."

"You wrong the girl—you really do."

"How did you become acquainted with the secret?"

"Very easily."

"But tell me how?"

"That is not necessary."

"Then I shall still believe Nannette to be false."

"Well, if I must clear the poor girl's character, I shall have to tell you all about it."

The Count had planned this coming explanation long before he had entered the room. To make a falsehood have the appearance of truth, was to him a thing of the greatest ease.

"You must know," he continued, "that I left François, my valet, behind, for the express purpose of watching you; he did his commission so well, that I became possessed of the full particulars. That was the way in which I found you out, not through Nannette."

"That may be; but François could never have opened my dressing-case and taken away the letters."

"There you are mistaken; it was François who did it all."

"How did he open the case?" said the Countess, with a bewildered look of incredulity.

"By means of a key which I had made for the purpose."

"You are very honourable."

"Suspecting that there were letters in the case, I resorted to this means to unravel the mystery."

"I cannot believe that Nannette has not had some hand in this."

"You are wrong to ascribe to her the guilt which belongs to another," said the Count.

"I must receive it as truth, as I cannot disprove it," replied his wife,

"I will now leave you for the present."

So saying, he withdrew, leaving the Countess to her own thoughts.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STREETS OF PARIS AT NIGHT.

WHEN they had succeeded in placing Mr. Morton and the lifeless body of their companion in the carriage, the two ruffians entered, and were soon running the gauntlet of the gendarmes. The night was one very favourable to their enterprise, being dark, without a star to be seen in the cloudy sky. The only lights were from the gas-lamps in the streets, stretching away in the distance, and losing themselves in the curves and turns of the narrow ways. It had come on to rain, not a heavy pelting one, but a drenching, mist-like sleet, blinding the eyes of the watchful guardians of the

night; and through this sleet the street-lights shone with a blinking sort of fitful ray, which seemed to die before reaching any object. The party drove through the most unfrequented parts of the Boulevart St. Germain, until they reached the lower and less respectable portion of the city; and then the danger incurred by the ruffians in pursuit of their enterprise became more imminent, for it is in those portions of Paris that the police look for the perpetrators of all the crimes of the town, and are very watchful of everything not in accordance with the usual routine of every-day life. Many an argus-eyed policeman glanced at the vehicle, as it passed at an ordinary pace, and felt an instinctive desire to interrogate its inmates, although little dreaming that two as abandoned wretches as ever came into the clutches of the law were contained in that quiet and respectable carriage. As the equipage, however, had the look of a gentleman's, the gendarmes, always fearful of making a mistake, persuaded themselves that it

must be the carriage of some man about town, out for a spree.

Thus did the party run the gauntlet so far in safety. In the meantime the men themselves were not, with all their coolness and natural bravery, free from some anxiety as to the result of this dangerous drive—for as such they looked upon it—and occasionally relieved their feelings by conversation.

"I say, my cove, there is a good deal of danger. I don't much like the thing," said Jean.

"The affair is very risky, but then we get paid for the danger," replied Pierre.

"It ain't so much this job that I would care about—this would not put our necks into the gallows."

"What is it, then, that you are croaking about?"

"You know those fellows might recollect us, if they had only the chance; but we have taken good care about that."

"That last thing of ours has nearly blown over. It was a pity for us that

we had to lay that old woman out, but we had no help for it, for she would have alarmed the place with her cries.

"Served her right, as she would not take advice."

Here Pierre shaded his eyes with his hand, and gazed through the misty window, against which the sleet drove, making it almost impossible to see. He succeeded only in seeing the lamps glimmer faintly through the heavy atmosphere, and in catching indistinctly a glimpse, now and then, of the shadowy outline of some person passing quickly onward.

"Lower the window a little, and look over it," said his companion.

Pierre did so, allowing the window to glide slowly down for about the space of an inch, and then applied his eyes to the opening. The first thing that met his gaze was a gendarme, but he did not at once close the window in a hurry, as some more inexperienced villain would have done, and by that means draw on himself the suspicions of the watchful guar-

dians of the night. No, he continued to look forth as calmly as if he feared not to stand face to face with the world and challenge its scrutiny.

They now entered a still lower portion of the town. The street through which the carriage passed was very narrow, dirty, and lined with wretched habitations, with still more wretched inhabitants. The overhanging eaves of the houses almost touched each other, and a few panes of glass served to admit the light of day, but never that of the sun, as the rays of that orb never penetrated so far into the miserable place. Horrible alleys diverged from off this narrow, winding way towards loathsome courtyards, or into other streets.

In consequence of the lateness of the hour, and the pelting rain, there were but few people to be seen anywhere about; and the ruffians congratulated themselves that in a few moments they would be at the end of their drive, and all would be safe.

"All right, my big un," said Pierre,

as he saw the coast clear, "we shall soon be all right and snug."

"I shan't be sorry, comrade, when the whole matter is done with, will you?"

"Not at all," was the reply.

At that moment the carriage suddenly stopped, and our two friends, suspecting the cause, prepared themselves to meet the difficulty as best they could. They did not waste their time in idleness, but sprang out of the door, and saw two gendarmes standing by the driver.

"Why do you stop us?" demanded Pierre.

"To see that nothing is wrong."

"You will find all as straight as yourselves, my fine fellows."

"We will look into the carriage," said one of the gendarmes approaching.

The two men exchanged looks, and made some sign, unintelligible to anyone but themselves, and grasped their clubs, at the same time satisfying themselves that their knives were also handy, if they should be required.

The gendarmes drew near to the vehicle, and opened the door, which had been closed after the exit of the two ruffians. One of them placed his head inside, and in another moment received a blow that felled him senseless to the ground, whilst Pierre struck the other with the same effect.

After this, which was but the work of an instant, the ruffians, after giving the prostrate men a parting blow on the head to insure silence, sprang into the carriage and were off at once. In five minutes more they stopped, and two other men having joined them, the two burdens were soon brought down a long, narrow, and winding alley, which led into a courtyard of small dimensions, exceedingly filthy, and running with dirty water. The buildings which enclosed the yard were high, overhanging, and in so ruinous a condition that it seemed as though every passing wind would shake them from their old foundations. There was generally a light suspended from one of

the houses, but on this evening, may be from accident, or may be from design, it was out; and the only light that could be seen consisted of some faint glimmering rays from one of its windows, that seemed afraid to enter the darkness.

Under the covering of this obscurity the party stole noiselessly along, and soon passed through a small noisome passage into a room, where a small candle was burning faintly, and sheltered behind a large tub, to prevent its throwing any of its rays into the passage.

The party stopped here, and having placed their burdens on the floor, began to discuss the means of disposing of the dead body of their comrade. They at length resolved to bury him in the cellar, and that at once, before the gendarmes were aroused by the outrage committed on two of their number only some few minutes previously. They sometimes searched houses, and that would be very unpleasant for them, as the finding of the dead man would lead to their ar-

rest, and the discovery of their former crimes.

Acting on this conclusion, two, it was arranged, were to take the body to the cellar, whilst the other two carried Mr. Morton to a vault at the extreme end of the house, and which no one could ever find but those who possessed the secret.

We will follow our friend to the place of his confinement. He was raised by Pierre and another man, who bore him along some dark passages, and then down a narrow dark staircase, which seemed to lead only to a small cellar, that had the appearance of being composed of solid masonry.

Pierre pressed his thumb against an unseen spring, causing a door to roll slowly back, revealing nothing but blackness and impenetrable gloom beyond. Mr. Morton was hurried down a few steps, and then placed on a miserable wooden bed, the clothes on which were in tatters. The other furniture of this elegant apartment, it may be mentioned, consisted of one three-

legged chair, with half the back gone, and one low stool.

Mr. Morton was now unbound, with the exception of his hands, of which his captors still stood in awe, although he lay senseless and helpless before them. They then removed the gag, and were on the point of going, when Mr. Morton exclaimed,

"Why have you brought me here to this foul place?"

"Foul place, indeed! Many is the time that I have spent weeks here, and thought it most comfortable; but it ain't like madame's boudoir," said Pierre, with a smile.

"You will live to repent this night's work."

"I don't know about that; it is a very good job—eh, comrade?"

"That it is; we have not had another like it for a long time—not since we cracked the crib in the country there."

"No more of that, my boy," said Pierre.

"What does the Count intend doing with me? I suppose it will end in my being murdered?"

"Well, I don't know; we have orders not to cut your throat at present, though we ought to, for your having killed our poor Victor; he was such a nice fellow—the jolliest one amongst us."

Mr. Morton was an essentially kind-hearted man, but we must confess that a grim smile of satisfaction stole over his countenance when he learned that one, at least, of his assailants had paid the penalty of his crime.

"I will send you something to eat in the morning," said Jean; "but you had better give us your money and valuables, for safe keeping—there are so many who would rob you."

The two ruffians laughed heartily at this wit.

Mr. Morton saw that there was no use in making any resistance, and allowed them to take his purse, watch and chain. They were also going to draw from his

little finger a plain gold ring, which seemed very old and much worn.

"My good fellow, that ring is but of little value to you, but to me it is very precious; if you will let it remain, you shall be paid twenty times its value, if I am ever at liberty; if not, why, you can take it from my dead body."

Seeing them hesitate, he continued,

"It shall be five hundred francs in your pocket, my men; you need not fear that I shall break my word."

"Well, you may keep the thing; it is not worth much. Come, comrade, let us go."

The worthies then left the cell, leaving Mr. Morton to his own thoughts.

Our friend mused on for some time over the events of the day, and, as may be supposed, heaped many reproaches on himself for not having listened to the voice of his forebodings.

"Fool! fool! that I was, not to give more heed to that strange presentiment; had I done so, this would not have been

my resting-place to-night. Here I am, no one knows of my whereabouts; my servant did not dream of where I was going —I ought to have left some word with him in case of accident."

And then his thoughts turned to the Countess, and he lost sight of his own perilous position as he reflected on that into which he had helped to lead the weak, beautiful woman.

"My own foolish and ever wicked conduct," he said to himself, "has brought on her this terrible blow. The Count will not spare her; she is now in his power, and he will no doubt use that power in a fearful manner."

And then Margaret's pure image filled his mind, driving away all other thoughts, and for a time making his heart lighter and happier. But the reaction soon set in, and he derived misery from that which had given him so much joy the moment before.

"My actions have been such as to doom me, maybe, never to see the sweet

face of Margaret again. Horrible, horrible thought! that I may never more taste the ecstasy of the bliss of her love. The one short instant that I felt she loved me was sweeter, far, than all the years of former life—it was the goal which my heart yearned to attain with insatiable longing. If I am murdered in this place, as I shall in all probability be, then all will be over. Margaret, if she loves me as I do her, will waste away her young life in useless hopes for my return! Margaret, Margaret, can you, will you forgive me?" he exclaimed in a frenzy of passion.

He continued to linger over the past, and look into the dark future, until sleep overcame his energies. It was not a quiet sleep, but restless and unpeaceful.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PRISONER AND HIS JAILER.

THE two men whom we, but a short time since, saw leave the vault in which our friend was confined, are now seated by a table, evidently awaiting the coming of some one. In a few minutes the door was opened by the other men who had gone to bury Victor in the cellar.

"Well, how did you succeed—is it all right?" said Pierre.

"Yes, my covey," replied the taller of the two new comers, "no one will ever discover his resting-place."

This man was tall, robust, and very powerful; he had brown hair, and a light complexion somewhat bronzed by exposure

to the vicissitudes of the weather; his eyes were grey and very full of expression, and his mouth bore the indication of firmness and great strength of character. He was dressed in a carter's grey frock, and wore that sort of rough fur cap which is very comfortable on a journey, but which makes even the most gentlemanly man look ruffianly.

"Come, let us sit down and have some supper; this night's work has given me an appetite, which even our comrade's death has not taken away."

In a few minutes these men were eating and drinking with the same composure as if they had not been committing any enormity, and they did not separate until large draughts of coarse brandy had reduced them to a state in which they were even more helpless than their prisoner.

Early the next morning Mr. Morton, who was awake, could hear distinctly the sound of footsteps approaching; and then, the door swinging back, Pierre and his companion of the night before entered,

bearing a jug containing some water, and a loaf of bread, which, they curtly intimated, was to be his breakfast. Having placed these luxuries on the stool, and untied his hands that he might eat, the two ruffians indulged in a few sarcastic not to say brutal remarks, and then turned to depart.

"Stay a moment," said Mr. Morton.

At this they arrested their progress, and waited to hear what the prisoner wished to say to them.

"Well, what do you want? We have not much time to waste, so out with it," said Pierre.

"You are fond of money, are you not?" asked Mr. Morton.

"Yes, we are. We never refuse to take what we can get."

"How much will you take to free me from this?"

"Oh! that is it?"

"Yes; name your price."

"You take us rather sudden, Monsieur."

"Do not hesitate to speak. I am

quite willing to give whatever you may ask."

"Now, that's like a gentleman," replied the jailer.

"Come, come, fix a sum."

At this the two men whispered together for some little time, and then the spokesman, Pierre, said,

"We are sorry, but were you to offer us a hundred thousand francs we could not accept."

"Then you find the Count more liberal."

"No, it is not that; but the truth is, we are in his power, and dare not act contrary to his commands. He does not give us anything like a hundred thousand francs."

"I will protect you from the Count."

"We dare not."

"Will you give me a light and a book, if you have any? I will give you an order for some money which you may get to-day, if you will let me have these things."

"We will, Monsieur," said Pierre, his great grey eyes sparkling at the thought of getting money.

"You must bring me some paper, a pen and ink," observed Mr. Morton.

These things were soon brought, and an order for two thousand francs was drawn out, and cashed that same day by our friend's bankers.

The books were obtained, the light was given, and the captive took pains to make his captors suppose that he had resigned himself to his fate; but during the evening he examined the vault in every way, in the hope of discovering some means of escape, and he at length found under the bed an instrument called in England a "jemmy." This burglar's weapon was hailed with joy by our friend, and he gazed upon it with a hopefulness akin to that with which the storm-tossed mariner gazes on the small blue rift in the angry clouds of Heaven.

The next morning, at about eleven, o'clock the door of the cell again opened,

and this time the Count de la Tour was the visitor.

"Good morning, Monsieur; you seem very comfortable here. I hope that the people are civil to you. It is no doubt somewhat of a change from your own apartments, and, may be, not as good as the boudoir of Madame the Countess."

"Monsieur le Comte de la Tour," replied Mr. Morton, "you need not insult me to make me aware that I am in your power."

"You are haughty, but your English pride will fall before you have done with me," said the Count.

"I trust that I shall be able to retain the pride proper to an English gentleman, under any circumstances," replied the prisoner calmly.

"We shall see."

"Do so, by all means."

"Will you permit me to ask why you thought fit to make my wife the object of your base intentions? Do you think that the honour of a French nobleman is

so light that it matters not what you do to insult it? You will find to your cost that it is to be respected by all."

"Monsieur, you are yourself as well aware as I am that no dishonour has been brought on your house by me or your wife."

"Then *you* also deny the truth. I had hoped that you would have listened to reason, but I find you as obdurate as your countrymen generally are. The day after to-morrow I will provide some strong inducements to make you speak the truth."

"Beware, Monsieur, how you offer me such an insult. Another such, and I will make you bitterly repent, before assistance can arrive."

"We had better be secure," said the Count, and whistled; whereupon the door opened, and displayed two men standing there with heavy clubs ready to give their master any succour that he might require.

Our friend saw that any recourse to

violent measures was useless, and resolved to remain quiet, and await the issue with calmness.

"At the time I mentioned we will apply the thumbscrew, and a few other little methods of drawing from unwilling lips the secret they refuse to confide when asked. I will now leave you."

Mr. Morton was again left in the cell to ruminate over the occurrences of the interview. He knew, from the manner and countenance of the Count, that what he said he meant. His intention was to force from him a confession which would fasten on the Countess the guilt which her husband wished to prove. This was a thing that he would never do; he would much rather suffer the most frightful death which the invention of man could suggest, than live at the expense of the honour of an innocent woman, whose only crime was that she loved him. At the same time, as he was by no means reconciled to the idea of dying without a struggle, he seriously

revolved in his mind the means of escape, for he was convinced that no amount of money would induce his jailers to liberate him. He then considered if it would do for him to attack the two men who came with his meals; and it seemed to him that he would have a good chance of disabling them without alarming the other portion of the gang, for the weapon which he had found was especially calculated to silence without speaking.

The more he reflected over this scheme the more feasible it appeared. He determined not to put it into effect, however, until the morrow, and in the meantime looked about him to see if, by the aid of the jemmy, there might be any chance of breaking open the door. This jemmy had been left there by Victor, who had lain concealed for some time in the cell, until a robbery had blown over, and who had, on leaving, forgotten to take it with him, and thus did a good turn to our friend.

The day and night were passed in vain attempts to force open the huge door which shut him from freedom, and on the following morning he fully made up his mind that when the men came in the evening at about half-past seven, he would put his plan into execution. However, at about five o'clock an idea suddenly struck him that the door might possibly be opened by a secret spring from the inside. Acting on this belief, he at once commenced an examination, but without the least success for about two hours, and was on the point of giving it up, when he observed a small spot on the door, which had the appearance of being often pressed by the thumb. With a beating heart he placed his thumb on the place, and in an instant had the satisfaction of seeing the ponderous door slowly swing back. Grasping his iron bar with renewed energy, as he felt himself gaining in his attempts at freedom, our friend stepped into the cellar into which the door opened, but

after a moment's pause, determined to return, and defer all further action until night.

This discovery acted on him in the most magical manner, and filled him with new vigour and hope. The few hours that he must allow to pass seemed as if they would never draw themselves out, so long did they linger. At length the two men came to bring him his supper, and left him without making any demonstration, which showed that they thought not for a moment of the possibility of the prisoner being able to escape from the dreary grasp of the cold damp vault which held him. The fact was, that they themselves did not know of this spring from the inside, the secret having died with a former occupant of the house. They had never discovered it, nor would Mr. Morton have done so, had not chance brought the spot under his eye at the very moment when he despaired of success.

Eleven o'clock, or as near that time as

he could calculate, was the time he fixed upon to make the attempt to gain his liberty. The time passed on slowly, as it always does for those who have reason to wish its rapid flight. The longed-for hour, however, at length arrived, and Mr. Morton, who had been seated on his bed, arose and prepared for the work which lay before him. He knew that danger was in his path, but to what extent he could not guess, so he nerved himself for the greatest. Grasping firmly his iron weapon, he blew out the candle, which he placed in his pocket, together with some matches given him by the jailers, who had received the trifle of two thousand francs for the few little things they had allowed their prisoner to have; and being thus prepared, he pressed on the spring, and was soon in the cellar, having carefully closed the door behind him, so that if anyone should come they might not know that he had flown until safety had crowned his scheme with success. He then

advanced cautiously along by the side of the wall to where he had seen a door when he had previously glanced into the place. This was soon gained, and then Mr. Morton, having listened for some time to ascertain if there was any one in the next apartment, gently opened the door, and found himself at the bottom of a steep staircase. Ascending this cautiously, he came to a narrow passage, which led him into another, and then another, until he began to think that he was losing himself in a labyrinth; but keeping in as straight a line as he could, he at length came to two rooms which were closed. From one he could distinctly hear the uproarious merriment of the ruffians, who were drinking and feasting on the money which had been paid as the price of his bondage. From the other apartment there came no sound whatever. Unfortunately, as Mr. Morton was standing almost motionless, his iron bar came in contact with the wall, which gave forth a dull, heavy

noise, loud enough to be heard in the inside by Pierre, who jumped from his seat and cried in a low tone,

"What's that, my boys? Did you not hear that sound in the passage?"

"I did," said one of the men.

"We had better see," said Pierre.

Our friend now thought that all was lost, and turning from the place, hurried down the passage until he reached the cellar, hoping to gain the cell before any one should come, when it struck him that he had closed the door and could not enter.

Fearful thought! "All is at an end!" he said to himself; but at the same time, being determined to sell his life as dearly as possible, he groped his way to the door, and, Heaven be praised! found that he had only shoved it partly to, instead of completely closing it. The moment that he was safe, he replaced the candle and matches, hid the jemmy, threw himself on the bed, and appeared to be fast asleep.

Pierre, followed by two others (there

were six altogether), holding a light in his hand, entered the passage at the moment that our friend had gained the cellar. The villain looked in every direction, but failed to discover anything to give rise to the least suspicion, and he was on the point of re-entering the room when he thought of the prisoner, and determined to see if he was all right. He led the way, followed by his companions, and on entering the cellar advanced on tiptoe to the vault, and listened for a moment, but all was silent. He then opened the door, and saw Mr. Morton stretched on the bed asleep, and being thus fully satisfied, he went back to his comrades, and said, "That nothing was up," upon which they resumed their carousal.

We will now return to our friend, and see what he will do after this very narrow escape.

In about fifteen minutes after being left to himself, he arose and again prepared himself for the enterprise. Again leaving

the vault, he went direct to the two doors, and at once tried that of the room from which no sound was emitted. It yielded to the pressure, and he found himself in a large apartment, entirely unfurnished, and with two small windows.

Mr. Morton at once went to them, and through the dirty and stained glass indistinctly saw an alley with houses facing it. He essayed for some time in vain to raise one of the windows, but at length succeeded. It had not been moved for years before, and was in the most rickety condition. Our friend feared that it would make a horrible creaking, but fortunately it only occasioned a slight sound, as the wooden parts, which had remained so long together, separated.

Mr. Morton now saw, by the aid of the moon, which was shining brightly above, that there was no chance of escape in this direction without the greatest peril. Beneath him was the passage, about twenty feet wide, and some twenty feet from the window; there was nothing to help his

descent, and, to make matters even worse, there was a dark open sort of a trench, running along by the side of the building, into which he could not peer; and he soon saw that it would be madness to attempt a descent, unless there were no other means of leaving the horrible den that he was in. He turned from the window to ascertain if there were any other outlet to the room than the one by which he had entered, and discovered in a far corner a door which was not entirely closed, and which he found communicated with a staircase. This he ascended, and reached a room smaller than the one he had just left, but also unfurnished. He did not linger there long, but pushing on, soon came to an apartment, the window of which opened on to the roof of an adjacent house. Raising the sash in an instant, our friend commenced a perilous attempt to gain the adjoining eave, which jutted out towards him. This was no easy task, and required all his strength to accomplish.

Mr. Morton calmly surveyed the scene before him, calculated the chances of success and failure, and resolved to attempt an undertaking, which, had he not been urged on by the love of life and liberty, would have appeared hopeless. In the air before him the sad and mournful face of a loved being appeared like that of a pitying guardian angel.

Underneath this window, from which Mr. Morton was about to issue, there was a sort of slanting shed, or attempt at a porch, an old wooden structure, so much dilapidated by age, that it appeared scarcely able to bear any weight besides its own. Opposite, at a distance of some eight feet from the edge of this shed, was the roof of the next house, to which Mr. Morton wished to pass, hoping to find there some means of escape. This roof, unlike the others of the neighbourhood, had at the eaves a flat surface of about two feet in depth, and it was to this that he intended to jump.

He now ventured on to the shed, and

let himself noiselessly down to the edge, and was on the point of making a spring, when suddenly the place gave way, and fell some forty feet on the ground below, causing a great noise.

Mr. Morton disappears for a moment from view; the fall will kill him—all will be at an end! But no, he has reached the other side, and is clinging on to the edge by his hands. Thank heaven! it is strong, and will not give way. By desperate and repeated exertions, he at length succeeds in raising himself to the roof, and gains once more a foothold. He then as swiftly as possible made his way along the side to where there was a house somewhat lower, and as he did this a head was thrust from the window which he left a few minutes before. It was Pierre, who, having found that the prisoner had escaped from the vault, followed in the direction of the noise, and had just arrived in time to see the prisoner on the point of leaving the roof of the opposite house. Without waiting an instant, he levelled a pistol and fired. The ball

grazed the intended victim's arm, and in another second he disappeared from the sight of the ruffian, who hurried back to arouse his companions and intercept the flying man if possible.

Mr. Morton, after reaching the next house in safety, saw that he could easily gain the ground by descending along some few roofs to a place whence he could let himself down to the ground with safety. This he did in a short time, and was on the point of darting through it into the street, where he hoped to find some assistance, if again attacked, when he encountered Pierre and three others, who barred his exit. He still retained the formidable weapon which he had found in the cell, and resolved to dash into the midst of the ruffians, and test its strength on their heads. Acting at once, so as to give them no time, he went at them, and soon saw two lying at his feet, but not before he himself had received a stab from one, and lost his hold of the jemmy. One of the miscreants, however, fortunately

fled, leaving our friend to deal with only one, who approached knife in hand. Mr. Morton seized the arm which held the dagger and threw the man's hand so forcibly against the wall that he dropped the knife, and then commenced a deadly struggle. This man was the one we have described as having been to bury Victor; he was a man of about six feet high, strong and robust, and a hard one to deal with, as our friend found him to be. After a wrestle of about five minutes, during which time a few hard blows were given and received, the result of the contest was, that Mr. Morton succeeded in throwing the villain to the ground, and jumped into the street a free man.

Without stopping to ask his antagonist whether he could be of any service to him, he at once made his way through the winding streets till he came to the Seine, when he followed the banks until he reached the Pont Neuf, which he crossed, and was soon at his own door, but not before he had passed some gen-

darmes, on whom his disordered dress and dirty condition did not fail to make a somewhat unfavourable impression. They allowed him to pass, however, without offering any interference; and the valet, who was still up, opened the door and welcomed his master. And we must here do the last-named sublime gentleman the simple justice of stating that, surprised as he was at the appearance of Mr. Morton, whose clothes were torn, soiled, and almost off his body from the terrible struggle with the ruffians, he asked no questions, but at once attended to the wants of his master, as though he had come *debonnaire* from an imperial ball, or jocund from a bachelor supper.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LETTER.

GATHERING themselves up as best they could, the miscreants returned to the house, crest-fallen at having lost their prey. They greatly feared the anger of the Count, and did not know how to appease it; and surely enough, on the very next morning came the Count, like a stormy fate, only to depart, vowing vengeance on his satellites for permitting by their negligence the escape of his victim.

The Count expected on that day to hear from the Englishman; but it wore away without any message from Mr. Morton, who was not able to write, as he had not yet recovered from the fatigue of the last twenty-four hours. The stab in the arm,

however, was only of a trifling nature, and on the third day after his escape from the vault he was himself again, and sat down to write to the Count de la Tour the following note:—

"Paris, Nov. 18th.

"MONSIEUR LE COMTE DE LA TOUR,

"After what has occurred, I deem it only consistent with my honour as a gentleman to communicate to you a true statement of my conduct in regard to Madame your wife. The Countess de la Tour is, as I believe she ever has been, true to the husband of her solemn vows. The duty which she swore to observe has never been transgressed—at any rate, her obligations have not been broken as far as I am concerned, nor has her virtue ever been sullied by even any word of mine. It is most true that the Countess was somewhat indiscreet in the manner in which she made my acquaintance, and did act in a manner not entirely consistent with her position; but never did she go beyond the

bounds of decorum and modesty. But, however this may be, I cannot but admit that you have a right to demand the satisfaction which one gentleman can give another. You chose to pursue a different course, and your conduct, Monsieur, has been unworthy of a nobleman and a man of honour; but, nevertheless, I am still willing to give you satisfaction, and beg to inform you that I am now at my apartments, where I intend remaining for this week, and will receive any communication you may be pleased to send.

"R. MORTON."

The above letter reached its destination, and caused the recipient to feel very much chagrined to think that this man whom he had had so lately in his power should write to him in this style. He cursed the miscreants for not having taken more care, so as to have prevented the escape of the man who had dared to offend him.

Long and bitterly did the Comte de la Tour consider over the letter, and many

were the conclusions he arrived at, and then threw aside as useless and unfeasible. At first he thought that immediate notice must be taken of the epistle, and that the reply to it must be a challenge; but then he reflected that this course might bring his conduct to the knowledge of the public, who would only be too glad of something tangible against him, for he was extremely unpopular. He debated long with himself as to the best way of meeting the difficulty, and at length resolved, after the most mature consideration, to let the matter rest, or at least to leave Mr. Morton to take the initiative.

Mr. Morton, not hearing from the Count, managed to inform the Countess of his safe deliverance, and then set out from Paris on his way to England, and returned to his native country a wiser and a sadder man. He had not been in London a day before he learned from Mr. Bland all that had occurred since his departure.

Mr. Morton then went down to his estate to contest the seat in Parliament for the neighbouring borough, which had become

vacant during his absence by the death of the late member. The contest was very stubborn between our friend and the other candidate, Lord Charles Brentford, the second son of the Duke of Milltown, who possessed great influence in the place; but, thanks to the untiring exertions of his solicitor, and some ugly spots on the private character of Lord Charles, Mr. Morton was returned by a majority of seventy-six; a result with which he was chiefly pleased, because it would give him an occupation which would serve to distract his thoughts from that ever-abiding sorrow which we have already alluded to as so strangely weighing down his young vigorous life, and to which was now added the pain caused him by his love for Margaret.

It is necessary for their very safety that men who, like Mr. Morton, are naturally possessed of active and vigorous minds, should find some outlet for their genius; and if it is not poured forth in some legitimate and praiseworthy manner, it will most assuredly assume other and evil ten-

dencies. No one is as bad, when he is bad, as a man upon whom refinement, education, genius, and wealth have been lavishly bestowed. All his powers, if not occupied in some good pursuit, are too often given up to the service of the worst and most degrading of passions. Mr. Morton had seen this, and resolved to impose upon himself duties whereby he would not always be thrown on his own resources for occupation. Shooting, hunting, and the amusements of town, during the season, he enjoyed to a certain extent; but not sufficiently to employ his time without drawing him into the other consequences which wait upon all those pleasures. Mr. Morton acted wisely in preferring to have some support rather than entirely to depend on his own strength of character to enable him to overcome the numerous temptations which beset the path of an idle man.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE UNRELENTING FATHER.

IN the manner mentioned in the last chapter did Mr. Morton pass away the time until about Christmas, when he received a letter from his friend Mr. Wilton, informing him, among other things, that Sir Henry Hargreave was the accepted lover, and was to be the future husband of Margaret Wendell. This communication did not in the least astonish our friend, as he had been expecting it for some time; but on one point he was very anxious. He desired to learn whether Sir Henry had been accepted by Margaret herself, willingly, without constraint; or whether Mr. Wendell had insisted on his daughter's receiving the offer of the Baronet's hand.

This he could not discover without meeting Miss Wendell, and to accomplish this he resolved to accept the invitation of Mr. Wilton, and call with him on the Wendells, which he trusted would give him the opportunity of asking the question, and hearing from her own lips the truth. Acting on this idea, he at once wrote to his friend, saying that he would give himself the pleasure of paying him the promised visit.

We will now leave for Wendell Hall, where we find Mr. Wendell, as is his wont, seated in the library, poring over some favourite author, but not so tranquil-looking or absorbed in his volume as usual. This is caused by the course he has been pursuing with regard to his beloved child, compelling her to wed the man she detests, and toward whom she could never entertain other feelings than those of aversion. The recollection of her mother often gave his heart a pang of remorse, but as yet had not been able to deter him from pressing on in the path he had resolved to follow. His pride—the

ruling passion of his nature—urged him in the strongest terms to force on a marriage which would so highly gratify it. At the same time, it should in justice be added, that he trusted, and almost felt confident, that Margaret would in time be as happy with the Baronet as he had been when blessed with her mother's cherished love.

In this manner did he reason, allowing his judgment to be clouded and deceived by an adherence to a blind and foolish weakness. Many had been the stormy interviews between the father and daughter, who was wild with grief, and maddened by the thought of being sold to the man she hated, as if she had been a thing of merchandise, and not a human being, with life and happiness to be considered. But all her sobbing and remonstrances were ineffectual, for her otherwise loving father was thoroughly possessed by the narrow idea that position was the first object of man, and love a minor consideration, which would follow in the train of the first.

Thus, with these conflicting feelings did they meet. Margaret threw herself on her knees, and implored her father in vain to have mercy, and not to doom her to such a never-ending misery as the contemplated alliance would necessarily bring upon her; but the father was stern and unrelenting, never bending in the least, although, when she mentioned the name of her mother, he with difficulty restrained his emotion.

The end of all was, that Margaret was obliged to yield to Mr. Wendell, and accept the hand of the Baronet, who from this time forward became a frequent visitor at the Hall, and who, notwithstanding that he knew of Margaret's aversion to him, delighted in being the accepted lover of one who had inspired him with a passion which burned within him like a raging fire. She, poor child (for she was but little removed from childhood), received his advances with the patient resignation of one who feels the impossibility of escaping from inextricable and crushing toils.

The Wendells had been invited to

Brompton Court for the Christmas, and accepted the invitation; Mr. Wendell, on this occasion, breaking through his habit of never going anywhere from home for any time, however short. He was delighted with the condition of affairs, and drew a wrong conclusion from Margaret's quiet and resigned manner, construing it into a change of feeling towards the Baronet, who was also deceived by her demeanour. Had Mr. Wendell been a man of more observation, better acquainted with the world, and had he studied human nature as much as he had his books, he would have formed a far different estimate of the condition of Margaret's feelings. But, as frequently happens in the case of even good and wise men, he chose to persuade himself that things were as he wished them to be.

The day came, at length, for the Wendells' visit to Brompton Court, and they set out in a close carriage and four horses, with postilions, Mr. Wendell still adhering to this old style of travelling, which has

now-a-days almost entirely gone out of fashion. We must confess that we have a great admiration for this old custom, and regret that it does not still hold its own; but, alas! the innovations of the present leave but little of the bright colouring and picturesqueness of the past.

Thus, we find our friends installed at the seat of their oldest neighbours, where they were on the morrow to partake of the hospitality of a good old Christmas festivity. Such a reunion as this is always pleasant, and we regret that there should be one unhappy heart to throw a gloom over the enjoyment of the assembly. But, alas! such was the case. There was a spirit there which grieved, and refused to be comforted.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LOVER.

THE bright sun of a winter's morning rose from out the East, glancing with its warm rays over the ancient seat of the Hargreaves. The snow had fallen during the night, and the grounds, which were entirely covered with the soft and fleecy white mantle, looked beautiful and bright. The trees were stripped of their foliage; but in lieu thereof were clothed in robes of angel purity and brightness. The rising day-god was stealing through the half-closed curtains of the room, which was honoured by the fair Margaret's presence; and there was an air of stately pride about it, as though it were conscious that never before had it been so well occupied, that never before

had the old carved oak bedstead held in its embraces one so lovely as the heiress of the broad lands of Wendell Hall. She lay there with half-opened eyes in dreamy wakefulness, from which she soon aroused herself, and gave her mind wholly to the contemplation of the past and present; until at length her smouldering thoughts flamed forth in words.

Her thoughts had reverted to an old and well-known subject, one that she had pondered over every morning, noon and night, for some two months; and that was Mr. Morton, the one who had stolen upon her like a sweet but perplexing dream, and robbed her of rest, taking from her young and innocent breast all peace and content. She thought of him, and wondered if he still loved her, or if he ever meant what his looks only too well implied. She feared at times to listen to her own questions, dreading that she should be compelled to dash the cup of happiness which she had tasted from her lips, perhaps for ever. Alas! and then, again, she remembered

that, even if he loved her, all was over, and that she was fatally and inextricably bound to another.

"Does he ever think of me now?" she murmured; "has he forgotten that he ever met me? has he looked into other eyes with the same gaze with which he troubled mine? Alas! alas! I greatly fear me that I do not hold any place in his affections. He, no doubt, paid to me only the same gracious court that he pays to all. I am the very foolish one; it is I who have fallen in love with him, not he with me. Had he known the wound that he was giving me with those soft glances, and speeches full of meaning to the listening heart, he would have acted differently. I cannot believe that he would delight in the knowledge that I was a victim to his thoughtless looks and words. No, no; I will still consider him in the light in which I first beheld him; nor will I listen to any more of the slanders which my suspicions are constantly throwing out against him.

"Will he never come? Last night I

dreamed of him; he was all himself; he more than said in dreamland that which I once foolishly thought he would have said in reality. Oh! that that vision had lasted for ever! Come, come, O sleep, and close my eyes, that I may again dream, and, in dreaming, have again that short-lived happiness which the waking day denies unto me!"

But sleep will not always come when summoned, and as the time has now arrived for rising, we will leave the chamber, and await the presence of the fair one in the breakfast-room.

Sir Henry, it need scarcely be said, was exultant, and dreamed of nothing but happiness. His aim had been accomplished, everything seemed to be going on in the most propitious manner, and if there were a few breakers ahead, he thought that he should readily pass through them. One thought, however, which he could not drive from his mind, would ever return to trouble his spirit, and arrest for a time his gratification at his success—and this was

his secret marriage to Florence. Something, he knew, must be done; and what was to be done, he had already planned and arranged. Nothing was now left to be accomplished but the carrying into effect the scheme which he had determined on putting into execution without any further delay.

Such were the feelings of the two principal persons who were to come together that morning. Breakfast was soon brought to a close, and then Sir Henry asked Margaret to accompany him to the billiard-room, where he would teach her to play at that game; to which she consented, without a word of remonstrance. As they left the room Mr. Wendell thought all was going well, and said to Lady Hargreave,

"They seem well contented together, do they not?"

"Yes, they do," was the reply; but her ladyship felt that in reality her visitor was sadly mistaken.

"A fine couple they make," said the old Lady Hargreave; "it does one good

to see young people enjoy themselves—it makes us feel young again in them."

"It does—it does; I am much younger in feeling to-day than I was a month previous to this," replied Mr. Wendell.

Margaret and Sir Henry Hargreave soon reached the billiard-room, and the Baronet set about teaching her to play. In the meanwhile the following conversation took place between them.

"You cannot imagine, Margaret, how happy you have made me by consenting to our marriage."

"You overrate your prize; you may not think so a year from hence," said Margaret, striving to smile.

"You mistake me, my dearest of beings; I could never tire of one so beautiful, so good, and charming in every way. You will try to love me, will you not?"

"Do not ask me that, it is enough that I should marry, without being bound to answer that question. You promised you would never annoy me by doing so."

"Pardon me, Margaret; did you but

know how devoted my love is toward you, I am certain you would not be so cruel."

"You show it by compelling me to do that which is most unpleasant!"

"What else can I do?—surely not give you up?"

"No true man would insist on marrying a girl against her inclinations—at least, I should imagine so," replied Margaret.

"You will never change. I had hoped that you would think differently in time."

"You little know a woman's heart."

"True, very true, there is no accounting for the conduct of a woman; her heart has ever been, and will always be, inexplicable."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes."

"Why, then, do you dare to take the chance of my ever being altered after becoming wedded to you, Sir Henry?"

"That ceremonious appellation again! Will you not drop the Sir?"

"I cannot, my tongue would not allow me."

"Am I, then, so odious that my name even should be so terrible to pronounce?" said the Baronet, somewhat irritably.

"We will not talk further on that old subject; it would be much better if we confined our attention to the game—it would be much more interesting."

"Do not be so cold; you know well I would rather be the object of your dislike than see another possess you."

"You have a queer taste—I should prefer any life to that of being united to one who hated me, no matter how much I loved him."

"You do not know the extent of the passion with which you have inspired me by your charms."

"You have told me that very often."

"You are sarcastic; but man's love will never yield to any obstacle. He first gains the prize he is striving after, and then endeavours to excite in the bosom of the fair one a response to the affection which burns so brightly in his own breast."

"Men are wonderful beings, if such is

their course of wooing. But there must be some exceptions to this general rule of yours—some generous ones, who would rather suffer themselves than bring despair and unhappiness on the being they love."

"You speak confidently. Have you ever met with one of these knight-errants?" said Sir Henry, bitterly.

Margaret blushed at the insinuation.

"No, I have never seen such a one; but I am convinced that there exists such a being as a man who can truly love—mind, I say truly love—not with a selfish passion, which only strives to gain its own ends, regardless of the wishes or desires of the one on whom it has fallen; but a man who can love with a high and generous passion—one who possesses soul as well as heart, and who listens to the pleadings of human charity—one who would scorn to blast the flower he would possess, but would rather let it bloom for another, who could cherish and preserve it from all the vicissitudes of life—no, no, Sir Henry, love

which is pure never destroys the object of its desire."

"You have described the condition of perfection extremely well, but I fear that you will never find the *beau-ideal* of your dreams."

"That may be, for now it is too late for me to have any hope; but were I at liberty to choose, such a man would be my choice."

"You are most courteous—really your conversation, Miss Wendell, is very courteous."

"You compel me to speak thus."

"Your respect for your future husband ought to influence you to speak in a more pleasant manner."

"I cannot say that which I do not feel; it would be a lie, and I trust that it is not necessary for me to tell one to please you."

"As you are so fond of truth, will you answer me a question?"

"That depends on what it is."

"I assure you that it is very simple."

"Tell me, then."

"No, you must promise me to answer before I tell it to you."

"I cannot do that."

"You are obstinate—never yielding."

"Why should I be otherwise?"

"It is useless to argue the point. The question is this: Do you love Mr. Morton?"

"That is a question which I cannot answer, and which you have no right to ask," replied Margaret, with heightened colour.

"It brings the blush to your cheek. I will answer for you—you do love the stranger."

"Sir Henry, I request that you will cease to annoy me."

"Then there is some truth in my statement?"

"You are insulting, Sir Henry Hargreave!" exclaimed Margaret, whose eyes flashed fire.

"The truth is hard to bear," replied the Baronet, who hoped to discover the reality.

"Is it consistent with the dignity of a man—one who considers himself a gentleman—thus to address a woman whom he has forced to accept his hand, when she could not give him her heart?"

"You must own that there is a feeling within you that draws your spirit close to that of Mr. Morton?"

"You need not ask me more; if you continue, I will return to the breakfast-room, and there seek for protection from your unmanly conduct."

"As you wish, I will for the future refrain from referring to a subject which causes you so much pain."

This was said in a most sarcastic tone. Margaret felt all its force, but could not make a reply.

Thus ended this conversation, which did not presage well for two people who were in a few months to be made one, by the aid of the Church. After the storm there came a calm, and all was seeming peace where late all had been discord. They

continued to play billiards for more than an hour, when Margaret, who was not at all interested in the game, proposed to join the family in the breakfast-room. Sir Henry complied with the request.

They were soon at their destination, and found there the two Ladies Hargreave and Mr. Wendell. Lady Harriet noticed a look of displeasure on the brow of her son, and, turning quickly to Margaret, saw that she also did not appear to be very much at her ease. Mr. Wendell, for his part, had not been blind to the constant aversion which his daughter had formerly shown at all times toward the Baronet, but he deluded himself into the belief that Margaret was day by day becoming more and more reconciled to the approaching wedding.

Many a father has, before this, allowed himself to be lulled into the dream that all was for the best, when he was deliberately sacrificing the happiness of a child, but never have we come in contact with one so obstinate and blind as Mr. Wendell. He

was a man possessing in an eminent degree what is called sound common sense, and could not be easily deceived in worldly transactions; but, as is so frequently the case with men exceptionally strong on one point, he was remarkably short-sighted on others, and rather chuckled over Margaret's present aversion to her *fiancé*, so convinced was he that she would love him when they were married.

The visit to Brompton Court at length drew to an end, much to the satisfaction of Margaret, to whom it had been a martyrdom, although everything had been done to make her sojourn pleasant and agreeable. Lady Harriet had been very kind and attentive, doing all that she could to afford amusement to her fair guest, and the dowager Lady Hargreave had also endeavoured to render the visit of her future grand-daughter as entertaining as possible. In fact, nothing that could be done was left undone.

No doubt Margaret would have entered into these gaieties with delight had there

not been a secret sorrow preying on her heart, which was made to burn with greater strength by the unwished-for presence of Sir Henry Hargreave. From regarding him with indifference she had come to hate him —she could not endure him. The time spent in his society was of the most irksome description, nor did she endeavour to conceal her aversion to her destined husband. This conduct on her part generally only excited her lover to new acts of devotion and tenderness; but at times he would fall into fits of uncontrolled ill-temper, when he saw how hopeless it was to try to gain the love of the woman whom he was soon to lead to the altar.

The time for departure having arrived, the carriage and four, with the postilions, draw up to the great door of Brompton Court.

The adieus are said, the party are all in the coach, the postilions crack their whips, and off they go, leaving the house in the distance.

As they disappear down the long avenue

of ancient trees, Sir Henry, who has lingered on the steps, returns into the Court.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WISHED-FOR EVENT.

TWO days after the Wendells had left Brompton Court, Sir Henry Hargreave was seated in his library reading a letter announcing the death of his kinsman, the Earl of Merwyn; and his countenance wore a look of extreme gratification, for this mournful event had given him all that he could have wished for, or even dreamed of in his moments of wildest fancy some few months since. He now occupied a position which would procure for him the homage of his fellow-beings; having been elevated from the high one which he had held to one far more dignified and great.

The old nobleman had been so overcome by the death of his three sons, that his

grief brought on a serious illness, resulting in his succumbing to the laws of nature, and thus placing Sir Henry in possession of the earldom and enormous property attached to the title.

The joy of Lady Harriet was almost as great as that of Sir Henry, but was concealed beneath a veil of outward grief, which she knew only too well how to assume; for she possessed the dangerous gift of dissimulation to a degree that rendered her almost able to turn the living truth into a lie, or else induce a listener to believe that the falsehood which flowed so smoothly from her mouth, bore the indelible stamp of truth.

The new Earl of Merwyn left his seat of Brompton Court that same day, to attend the funeral of his distinguished relative; and, that duty having been performed, he at once proceeded to London, where he made all the necessary arrangements for his intended scheme. This occupied about a week; and we may here just mention, that during that time his lordship had been

in the habit of meeting a man of rather questionable reputation, one on whom the sharp eye of the police had been for some time fixed.

About ten days after leaving the Court, the Earl set out for Richmond alone, and arrived at the small villa which contained Florence and her child, who ought to have borne the proud title of the Viscount Glendower. The Earl had determined, however, that they should never learn his present position. His mind was filled with designs and plans of a dark nature. He was bold, daring, and resolute; there were few things that could deter him from the pursuit of his end, and although he had never committed a crime for which the laws of his country could bring upon his head any punishment, we much fear that, had he been tempted, he would long since have yielded to his own passions, preferring to risk all, rather than allow anything to be different from what he desired it should be.

Florence had been anxiously waiting for

the last two months for her husband's re-appearance, according to his promise. The time had hung on her hands heavily; day after day had passed without the coming of the loved one. The heart of the trusting wife was growing sick within her, and her hopes were fast yielding to fear and despair. Now and then she received a letter from the faithless one, adding new promises of a speedy return, which so far had never been fulfilled. Dreary thoughts would continually occupy her mind, fearful forebodings would force themselves into her almost distracted brain. Her only comfort was the society of the little boy, whom we saw playing at her feet on our last visit to Wilmot Villa. The little one, with his innocent gambols, wiled away many an hour, chasing the clouds from his mother's brow. Nothing could resist the influence of his sunny smile. The dreary thoughts, the forebodings, and the misery of suffering, vanished in the presence of that loved, idolised face, which beamed with never-ending joyousness.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOPE.

ONE morning in January, Florence was brooding, as usual, over the neglect and unkindness of her husband, when the door was suddenly opened, and in walked the long-wished-for one, bringing with him the sunlight of his presence, which diffused hope throughout the whole being of the devoted wife. He embraces his wife and child, seeming most happy in the bosom of his little family; he wears the old smile which in other days won the heart of Florence. She is content, and all goes on well; they talk of the present, past, and future—all is sweetness, all is joy, there is nothing to cloud the brightness of the scene. The infant naturally comes in for

his share of attention, and the fond mother's heart swells with pride at the praises lavished on the child.

The Earl said that he had grown much prettier than he was when last he had seen him; the colour of his eyes was brighter and more beautiful than ever, his mouth more lovely, and in fact there was nothing of praise that could be said that was left unsaid by the father, and all for a purpose unsuspected by his wife, who believed all as if it were the essence of truth. Florence also was made the object of flattering remarks by her husband, who seemed to have discovered new beauty in every feature, new grace in every contour of her figure, and as, like all women, she liked flattery, she placed full confidence in that of the Earl.

The day wore itself away, the evening came, and all went on in the same pleasant path, smoothly and joyously; and Florence enjoyed a few of those rare hours which sunlight itself would spoil—those hours in which, seated over the fire-lit hearth, hus-

band and wife, sometimes with arch smiles looking back upon the past, and sometimes with earnest gaze striving to penetrate the future, seem all in all to each other, and regard the great outside world as only a dark foil to their own happiness.

The morning's sun arose from out the East in the fulness of his glory, sending in level rays o'er hill and dale his resplendent beams, tinging the mountain-tops with his brightness, skimming the surface of the lakes, fringing their ripples with gold, diffusing through all nature the warmth and life of his molten streams. The robins were singing, giving to the winter day the sweetness of their melodious voices, in soft and musical warblings, which fell on the ears of the awakening world in mild strains of harmony.

On such a morning as this did the Earl and Florence rise to behold the beauty of nature, and, as the latter fondly thought, to exult in their mutual happiness. Florence was now full of life and joy; she was radiant with hope; her husband had told

her something which gave her new existence, and made the past with all its miseries fade into forgetfulness. The magic word had been spoken, and had changed the almost heart-broken wife into a joyous creature. Wonderful and quick had been the transition from melancholy to happiness. There is no magic like the magic of a loved one's smile. The magical word which had broken the spell was "acknowledged," and that to be before the whole world, as the wife of Sir Henry Hargreave. The Earl had told Florence that there was no longer any necessity for concealment, that the time for secresy had gone by, that she could now stand before society in her true position, as the loved and honoured wife of Sir Henry Hargreave. This was what had thrilled her soul with pleasure, turned the current of her thoughts, and made her put her trust implicitly in her husband. The past, with its slights and wrongs, had all failed to teach her to be wary of one who had once deceived her. This last proof of his affection was to her as a never-to-be-

doubted proof of his love; and, indeed, a more experienced woman than herself could scarcely have doubted, judging from his words, which fell softer and sweeter on her ear than the dew on the petals of the rose.

"Florence, dearest, what shall we do to pass away the day, as we shall not be able to leave until to-morrow?" said the Earl, as they were seated at the breakfast-table.

"As for me, I shall enjoy anything with you; your society, dearest Henry, will be sufficient for me," replied Florence, with a sweet and sunny smile playing around her mouth, giving to her face a soft and gentle expression.

"You are a silly little one to be so easily contented. Is there nothing that you would like to do?"

"Nothing, I assure you, unless you care for it yourself, and then I should be only too happy."

"As you say, we can find amusement enough at home to while away the day; with you and the baby it will not seem very long."

"Have you said anything to your mother about me, Henry?"

"No, dearest, I have not; but that matters not. She will soon know all about you, and also see your ladyship," said the Earl smilingly.

"How I tremble at the bare idea of meeting her! What sort of a person is she?—do you think she will like me, darling?"

"I do not see any reason why she should not; but as to the kind of person she is, I will tell you in a few words. My mother," continued the Earl, with an ugly curl of the lip as he spoke, "is a woman who has a strong will of her own, yielding to no one, but maintaining her opinion against that of all others. She is truthful to a degree in her own estimation, but, unfortunately, others who know her do not think so highly of her veracity. She is pious to a pitch which allows no one else to participate in religion, and, whilst she looks on herself as one of the elect, regards the rest of the world as benighted. To tell

the plain truth, the whole substructure of her character is hypocrisy; she makes religion a trade, and truckles with truth. Moreover, she is stern, with the temper of a fiend, which needs but little to arouse it, and when once aroused, it is not easily appeased."

This was the description of Lady Harriet by her beloved son, and there can be no doubt that it was a correct one, though his lips should have been the last to have uttered it, for he had never experienced anything but the fondest love and most unlimited devotion from her. Florence had listened, with the greatest astonishment and wonder depicted on her countenance, to the picture given of Lady Harriet by the Earl, who had, during the description, preserved the utmost coolness, mingled with a touch of bitter sarcasm.

"You frighten me, dearest! Lady Harriet must be an awful woman, from what you say. If she be like that I shall be afraid to be in her presence."

"Nonsense, Florence, you will forget all

that. When you once hear her talk, you will believe that all that I have said must be untrue."

"Why, how can that be?"

"Very easily, my dear wife. My mother possesses that wonderful faculty of persuading people that the truth is a lie, and that a falsehood is the truth. Extraordinary as it may appear, such is the case. I myself have often doubted my own knowledge when listening to her, and have had to bring to mind some positive proof to convince myself that I had not been labouring under a delusion. She is a wily woman, and they must be quick-witted indeed who would avoid being deceived by her."

"You must be mistaken. Surely she cannot be all that you say?"

"Everything; but then you must know that she often loses herself in the labyrinths of her own mystery."

"Has she no redeeming qualities? You said she would have died if you had disclosed our marriage."

"True, true; she has one, as far as I am concerned—she loves me to absolute worship, her devotion would induce her to make any sacrifice for me if misfortune had fallen on me. The knowledge of our marriage would have no doubt been the cause of the greatest grief to her, if it had not brought on a serious illness. I ought to have the highest regard and most devoted love for her, but then, you see, I cannot be blind to her faults."

"Yes, I can understand that; but I am sorry that she is not different."

"We had better wait until you have seen her, and we can talk more on the subject."

Upon this Florence at once dropped the matter, so accustomed was she to obey the slightest wish of her husband.

"You must not, Florence, mention anything about who you are to anyone in this house."

"Why not, darling?" said Florence, who did not like this little cloud coming over the horizon of her happiness.

"For good reasons that I have."

"Just as you wish, dearest Henry."

"You need not, however, continue to conceal your real position after leaving this."

"That will not be long."

"You see, to tell you all, I do not wish the people about here to know that my wife has been living so long under the name you have until now borne. Do you not think that it is best?"

"Yes, I do."

"Everything must be ready, so that we may start for London by the seven o'clock train in the evening. Can it be done?"

"It can—there is plenty of time."

The rest of the day was spent in packing, talking, and playing with the little boy, who had now become accustomed to the voice and appearance of his father. The child, who was able to toddle about the room, would climb up the Earl's knee, and receive with pleasure the pettings of his father. Florence would gaze on a scene like this with pride and joy; it

would make her young heart beat with happiness such as she had experienced when first the Earl had told her of his love.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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